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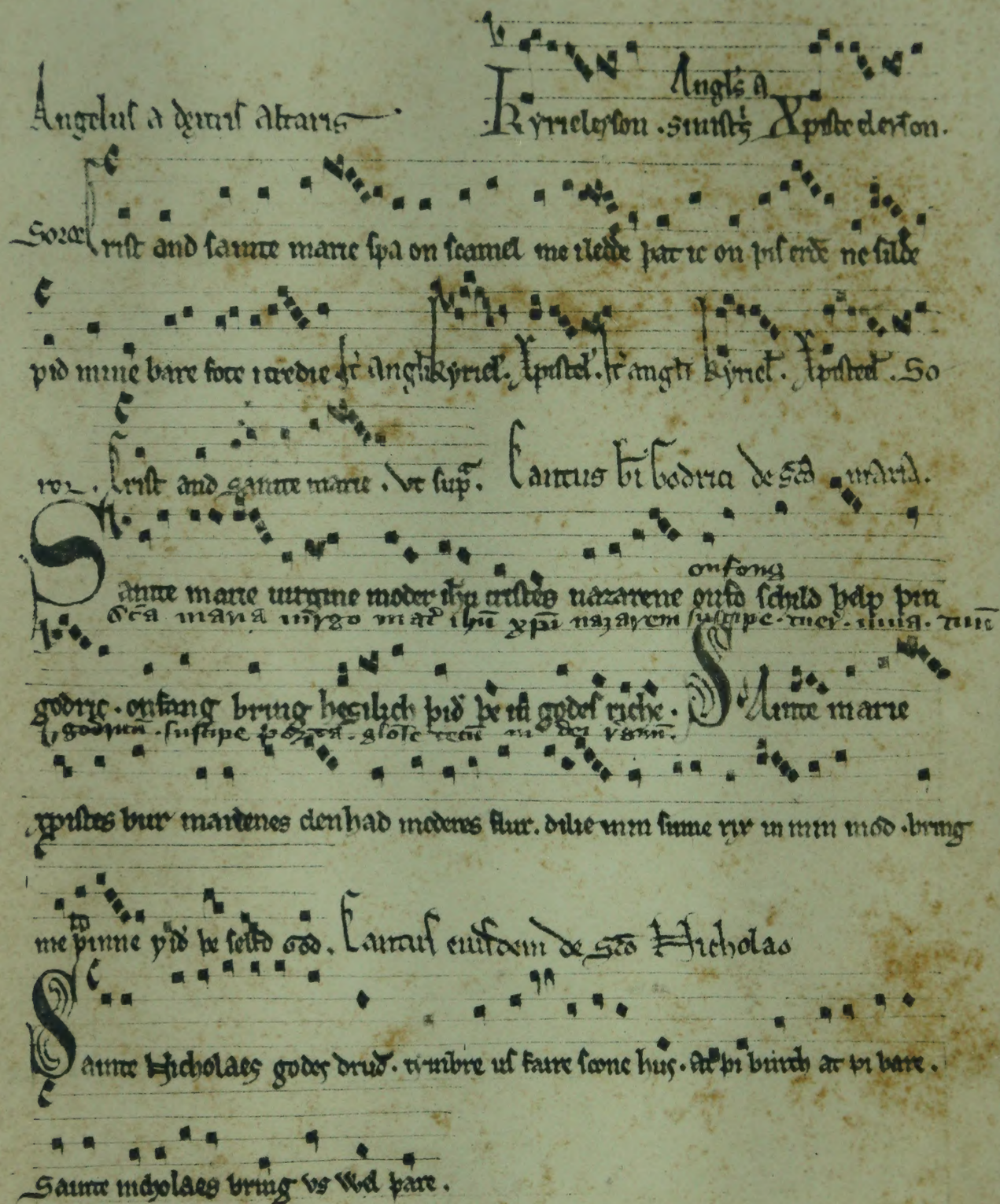

Angelus ad virginem Kyrieleyson. Sancte Xriste eleyson.

Sother crist and saunte marie spa on seamel me tiede pat ic on pis erde ne silde

pid minne bare fote tredie fr angli kyriel. Xpistel. fr angli kyriel. Xpistel. So

wor. crist and saunte marie. Ve sup. Sanctus bi godric de scā undrid.

Saunte marie uirgine moder ihu cristes nazarene onfong scā maria uirgo mat ihū xpi nazarem suscipe-mer.-iuuig.-tuic

godric. onfang bring hesilich pid pe ti godes riche. Saunte marie

godric. suscipe p̄ sācta. gloie tuā in dei vsum.

cristes bur mardenes clenhad modenes flur. dilie min saule tyr in min mod. bring

me pinne pid pe selfd god. Sanctus eudem de scō Nicholao

Saunte Nicholaes godes drud. ti mibre us faure saule hus. fr pi birch ar pi bare.

Saunte micholaes bring vs wel pare.

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A HISTORY

OF

ENGLISH PROSODY

FROM THE TWELFTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

BY

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

M.A. OXON; HON. LL.D. ABERD.; PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

VOL. I

FROM THE ORIGINS TO SPENSER

'Ainsi karoloient illecques.'—*Roman de la Rose*

London

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1906

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PREFACE

THE proposed enquiry, which the writer has meditated for a good many years, and which, a little helped but more hindered by his earlier professional duties as a critic and journalist, has become an actual part of his later work as a professor of literature, is devoted to a subject entirely neglected for some centuries of our literary history. Treated partially and sporadically during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth, and never attempted as a whole until Mitford's essay towards the end of this last, it has during the nineteenth been pursued with increasing attention; but too often in the fashion of shreds and patches, and almost always with a view to enforcing and illustrating preconceived ideas on certain points. The most famous instance of this is of course Dr. Guest's *History of English Rhythms*. No book known to me in English, except the two just specified, attempts a complete historical examination up to its own time; and while Mitford's, good as it is, is perhaps injured by prejudice and certainly by necessary imperfection of knowledge, the conclusions drawn at every page by Guest from his admirable collection and digestion of material, almost deserve Southey's contemporary dismissal of them as "worthless."

I shall endeavour to avoid such misfortunes, not by any superior dexterity in handling, but by the humble virtue of sticking to the facts—of examining, through at

least seven hundred years of verse, what the prosodic characteristics of English have actually been, and what goodness or badness of poetry has accompanied the expression of those characteristics. In other words, I shall try—as in other histories of literary matter which I have written, so in this which I hope to write—to remember that the Rule comes from the Work, not the Work from the Rule. As to this work itself, I believe I have read[1] nearly all the printed stock of English verse before 1600; and I know that I have read every poet of the slightest repute since that date, and a great number of poets who neither have nor deserve any. The process has taken some time and labour. I trust that the result, if it be ever completed, may have at least some value.

I had made up my mind from the first to make the book a history of prosodic study as well as of prosodic expression, but on mature consideration it seemed better not to deal with the former subject in this volume. It would at most have been possible to include, in its last Book, a thin chapter dealing with Gascoigne and a few other authors who can be much better dealt with in the next. Only the battle of classical metres falls necessarily to be noticed here, and that can be anticipated a little and redone later.

It may seem surprising that, postponing so much, I should undertake, or hope, to finish the enquiry in two more volumes; but I think the method of thorough investigation of the origins will justify itself. It is the neglect of these origins, or the insufficient examination of them, which has been at the root of most of the mistakes on the subject. And when this neglect is repaired, much will become quite clear, and need little fresh presentation

[1] As these statements are sometimes misunderstood, I may perhaps be allowed to say that this is not in the least a boast, but merely a guarantee. That it should be superfluous, I quite admit: whether it is, I leave those who know to judge.

in the later story. I cannot hope, in treating a matter so complex, so seldom treated hitherto as a whole, and so full of little traps of detail, to have avoided slips wholly: but I trust there are not too many of them.

I think I have never yet failed to acknowledge and salute my predecessors. And therefore I may say that this book owes hardly anything to Dr. Schipper's elaborate and painstaking *Englische Metrik*. I saw from the first that it could be of little use to me, as it was absolutely necessary to make the examination of facts anew and independently; and I constantly find that great gulf between its handling and mine which must always exist, in the particular subject, between a foreigner and a native. I admire his diligence and his learning unstintedly, but "he works his work, I mine." Of all previous important prosodic studies, English and American, I hope to give due account in the succeeding volumes.[1]

I have thought it better to give the necessarily numerous examples in footnotes: first, because the inclusion of them in the text breaks and disturbs argument and exposition; secondly, that those who dislike the text may have the solace without the sin. And I hope the frontispiece-photograph of the Godric fragments may deserve at least the praise, once bestowed on another facsimile, of being "a thing of value" in "an otherwise worthless book." The combined summaries at the end of each period, and the Appendices on pervading subjects, may be serviceable, and I have, as always, endeavoured to make the Index as useful as possible. The little Glossary of technicalities prefixed is offered out of no impertinent

[1] The work of Mr. Bridges and Mr. Omond, and the prosodic part of the *History* of Mr. Courthope, all of whom I may, I hope, call my friends, must be at least mentioned here. I have the misfortune to disagree sometimes with all of them—there is no such "fair field full of *fighting* folk" as Prosody; but this does not affect my salute. And had Mr. J. B. Mayor's *English Metre* been fuller, I had hardly written this book.

officiousness, or presumption of the reader's ignorance, but on strong representations of its desirableness.

Unfortunately, I cannot hope to escape the penalties of "interloping," as far at least as this volume is concerned. Very little attention has hitherto been paid to Middle English literature as literature, and the attention that has actually been paid to it has been bestowed mainly by those who are philologists first of all, if not last of all also. I "follow not them," for reasons partly exposed at pp. 166 sq. of this volume; and even if the Scaligerian tradition of manners had not clung to philology, I could not expect a warm welcome—in the good sense. It is even not quite uncommon already to find warnings, quite genuine and respectable, uttered in reference to the supposed prejudices arising, in dealings with such matter as that of the early part of this *History*, from acquaintance with the later developments of English literature. Such prejudices are, no doubt, possible. But I would very strenuously entreat students of the subject, and critics of this book, to consider whether there is not another set of prejudices which is likely to be at least equally operative, being derived in all cases from neglect of these developments, and in some, perhaps, from insufficient acquaintance with them. It is not very difficult—it can at any rate be done with some application in no very great number of years—to acquaint oneself with the theories of phonetics and philology, and to apply them in an orthodox manner to whatsoever presents itself. It takes a very much longer time—a number of years which excites not so much sensations of pride as sensations of ruefulness as one looks back on it—to acquaint oneself with English literature and English poetry at large. In the one case there is a cheerful and helpful body of teachers, fellow-students, and disciples, to rally round one, and assert the prerogative of scholarship; in the

other it is only here and there that one can look for a comrade who has gone through the same experiences. And while in the first case the differences no doubt existing, and existing rather importantly for our present purpose, are minor; on the other they are sometimes much more important, and prevent the assumption, towards the public of laymen, of that confident corporate face which has so much effect. Yet it was not, as a rule, in company that the knight of adventure achieved the best rewards of the adventurous.

I do not know whether it is too personal to give as a conclusion the origin, or one of the origins, in my own case, of the central idea of this book, that feet or "spaces" are the integers, the grounds, the secret, of English prosody. More than forty years ago, I was reading the *Odyssey* one evening in a set of Oxford rooms, on the ground-floor looking into Merton Street. Somebody had a wine not far off; and the respectable "Slap" (whom Oxford men of my generation will remember) had brought his "noise" to the spot according to custom. Just as I came to the Song of the Sirens, they were playing a certain waltz of the day, well known to me (for like the unfortunate hero of a contemporary comic ditty I was "very fond of dancing") as *The Cornflower*. And it struck me, as I listened to the slow voluptuous music, and read the famous line with the clinging *u* sound pervading it, and rendered poignant by the sharper *i*'s and *o*'s and *a*'s—

Δεῦρ' ἄγε νῦν,[1] πολύαιν' Ὀδυσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος [Ἀχαιῶν],

with how little truncation (of the last word only) it could be adjusted—*spaced*—to the waltz-time itself, different as it is from that of the natural hexameter. I do not mean to say that I elaborated a theory of prosody at the age of

[1] This is surely better than ἄγ' ἰών.

eighteen. But I had, even before that, been accustomed to scan (and if possible to scan in different ways) the poetry of which I was, and ever have been, an unsatiated and insatiable lover; and by degrees things shaped themselves. Perhaps the Sirens are dangerous guides here as elsewhere, but I have never been so certain of that. At any rate, I am sure that attention to prosody never barred or spoiled attention to poetry, except in those who have been made unpoetical from the beginning. The poets, it is true, escape us more or less. "Their feet have trod so near to God, we may not follow them." But some footprints on the ways by which they reached the Divine Presence remain. And of these ways perhaps the most clearly trodden, and perhaps the farthest-reaching of all, is the Way of Metre.[1]

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

EDINBURGH, *Feb.* 22, 1906.

[1] I cannot express my thanks too heartily to Professors Ker, Elton, and Gregory Smith for the kindness with which they have read my proofs on this rather troublesome matter, and for the admirable suggestions which they have made. Also I must warmly thank my colleague, Mr. A. B. Webster, Lecturer in English in the University of Edinburgh, for undertaking to read the final proofs of the illustrative passages once more with the books, and Mr. Fuller Maitland and Professor Niecks for information as to the Godric music. Lastly, if it be not too impudent, I should like to express my infinite thanks to two other friends, who, I fear, will disapprove many things in this book—to Dr. Furnivall and to Professor Skeat. But for their work, for that of others whom they very mainly have encouraged and enlisted, and for that of Thomas Wright most of all in the generation before them, we should not have had those texts without which I myself never care to work on any subject whatsoever, and which in this case have gone far to secure us access to the whole range of English poetry. I dare say my use of what they have provided is vicious; but at least no one shall say of my book, as Sir Philip Sidney said in a certain audacious poetic inversion, "Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?"

CONTENTS

BOOK I

THE PERIOD OF THE ORIGINS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

PAGE

The Title—Definition of subject—Matters barred or subordinated—The matter preferred, and the method to be applied to it—The time concerned — Illustrations from Professor Skeat on Guest and Chaucer—Antecedent Prosodies—Anglo-Saxon—Latin—Its divergent lessons—The earlier or "classical" metre—The later "accentual" rhythm—The clash of Rhythm and Metre—Rhyme—Greek (?) — French and Provençal — Scandinavian — Celtic — Summary 3

CHAPTER II

FROM 1100 (?) TO 1210 (?)

Difficulty as to dates and documents—Working solution and selection —The Canute song—The fragments of St. Godric—The *Paternoster*—The *Moral Ode*—The *Orison of Our Lady*—Layamon—The *Ormulum*—The lesson of their examination—The "foot" or "measure unit"—Its internal and external arrangement—Resemblances and differences of the result as compared with the mother-prosodies—The importance and influence of rhyme—Illustrated from the *Rhyming Poem* and Layamon—From the *Ormulum* and the other pieces—From the *Paternoster*, *Orison*, and *Poema Morale* —And generally 27

CHAPTER III

THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

PAGE

The documents—Layamon B—The later *Moral Ode*—The *Bestiary*—*Sinners Beware*, etc.—The *Love-Rune*—*The Owl and the Nightingale*—Tendency to syllabic rigidity—The correctives of this—Versicular survival: *Proverbs of Alfred*—Modified in *Proverbs of Hendyng*—*Genesis and Exodus*—The Northern Psalter—Robert of Gloucester—The earliest Romances: *Havelok*—*King Horn*—The earliest English *fabliaux* 50

INTERCHAPTER I 72

BOOK II

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE METRICAL ROMANCES

Scale and matter of the period—The general prosodic phenomena of metrical Romance—The Auchinleck MS.—The octosyllabic couplet poems—Those in "Romance stanza"—Origin and character of this—Other stanzas: *Sir Tristrem*—Others—*Lybius Disconus*, etc. 89

CHAPTER II

ALLITERATIVE ROMANCE AND THE ALLITERATIVE REVIVAL GENERALLY

The reappearance of alliterative measure—Its character: interim comparison of Layamon and Langland—The wholly unrhymed poems: *William of Palerne*, etc.—Character and influence of their versification—The poems with rhyme and stanza—*Gawain and the Green Knight*—The *Awntyrs of Arthur*—The *Pistyl of Susan*—*The Pearl*—Merits and dangers of the blend—Character of the reaction generally 100

CHAPTER III

MISCELLANEOUS METRICAL POETRY BEFORE OR CONTEMPORARY WITH CHAUCER—GOWER

PAGE

Robert of Brunne—His metrical jumble—Lyric: MS. Harl. 2253—Analysis of its metres—*Alison*—The Cuckoo Song, *note*—Lesson of these—Especially as to Equivalence and Foot-division—The Percy Society "Religious Poems"—William of Shoreham—Wright's "Political Songs"—The *Cursor Mundi*—Minor poems of the Vernon MS.—"The Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil"—"The Castle of Love"—Hampole—Minot—Gower—His octosyllabics—His other verse—His general quality . . . 112

CHAPTER IV

CHAUCER

Plan of campaign—What Chaucer had before him in prosody—His work: The *Romaunt of the Rose*—The early "Minor Poems"—The *A B C* and its stanza—Rhetorical prosody—The *Complaint unto Pity*—Rhyme-royal—The *Book of the Duchess*—The *Complaint of Mars*—The *Parliament of Foules*—The other Minors—Their lesson—*Troilus and Creseide*—The *House of Fame*—Cadence, *note*—The decasyllable: retrospect of its origin; and study of its virtues—The *Legend of Good Women*—Digression on difficulties—The *crux* of text—"Critical" editions of the classics and of Middle English—Solid points for discussion: the stanza forms—The lines—Decapitation or initial monosyllabic foot—Trisyllabic feet—Elision and Slur—Trisyllabics proper—Alexandrines—Syllable-values—Rhyme—Note on "Chauceriana" . . 143

NOTE ON CHAUCERIANA 178

CHAPTER V

LANGLAND AND OTHER ALLITERATIVES

Piers Plowman—Its general character—The verse compared with Anglo-Saxon—With Layamon—Its intrinsic values: Structure—Alliteration—Rhymelessness—Quality of the lines—Qualifications of the rhythm—Other alliterative poems *c.* 1400 . . . 179

INTERCHAPTER II 189

BOOK III

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE DRAMA

PAGE

The *Harrowing of Hell* — The *York Plays* — The *Townley* — The *Coventry*—The *Chester*—The rest 203

CHAPTER II

THE SUCCESSORS OF CHAUCER

Ungracious state of the subject—Lydgate and his reputation—His older panegyrists—His recent defenders—The *Minor Poems*—*London Lickpenny*—The *Story of Thebes*—The *Temple of Glass*—The *Assembly of Gods*—The *Secrets of the Philosoffres*—The *Two Nightingale Poems*—The *Pilgrimage* and other octosyllabic poems —Occleve—An interim lesson from the pair—The last group— —Barclay—Skelton—His "doggerel"—The "Skeltonic" verse . 218

CHAPTER III

BALLADS AND OTHER FOLK POETRY—MISCELLANEOUS

The "Ballad Question" not ours—Ballad metre very much ours—Its history and qualities—The original fourteener—*Chevy Chase*—*Gamelyn*—The *Nut-brown Maid*—The great *Carol*—The Suffolk Dirge — Miscellanea: songs and carols — Miscellanea: longer works 246

CHAPTER IV

THE PROSODY OF THE SCOTTISH POETS

Character and relative importance—Correctness and its moral—Points for attention—Early octosyllabic couplet: Barbour—The *Saints' Lives*—Wyntoun—Blind Harry—James I.—Henryson—Dunbar—His successors not equal—Douglas—The *Æneid*—The original poems—The Eighth Prologue—Lyndsay—The Reformation satires

PAGE

—Minor poems generally—Alexander Scott—Old-fashioned beauty of his metres—Montgomerie—The *Cherry and Slae* metre—Others —Hume and Mure 265

INTERCHAPTER III 288

NOTE ON THE THREE PRECEDING BOOKS . . 299

BOOK IV

THE COMING OF SPENSER

CHAPTER I

THE TURN OF THE TIDE—ITALIAN INFLUENCE

Outline of subject—Specific quality, for the purpose, of Italian, and of the sonnet itself—Wyatt's general effect—The English sonnet—In Wyatt—In Surrey—Other forms—"Poulter's measure"—Wyatt's intertwisted decasyllables—Surrey's other metres—His blank verse 303

CHAPTER II

THE TURN OF THE TIDE—CLASSICAL INFLUENCE

Twofold direction of this—Pseudo-classical "versing"—Metrical study 318

CHAPTER III

THE POETS BETWEEN SURREY AND SPENSER

Constituents—Predominance of the fourteener—Googe—His snapped verses—Turberville—Tusser—Gascoigne—The later miscellanists —The translators—Sackville—The *Mirror for Magistrates* . 322

CHAPTER IV

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA TO MARLOWE

The great transition—Its chief plank: doggerel Alexandrines—Bale's *King Johan*—*St. Mary Magdalene*, etc.—*Heywood*, etc.—Progress of the doggerel—Examples—*The Four Elements*—*Calisto and*

PAGE

Melibœa—*Every Man*, etc.—Others—And others again to Shakespeare—The metrical aspect of the doggerel group—The infancy of blank verse—*Gorboduc*—Contrast of potentiality and later achievement—The *Misfortunes of Arthur*—The Marlowe group . 335

CHAPTER V

SPENSER

His position, looking before and after—The *Shepherd's Kalendar*—The "February" metre—The others—Other poems—*Mother Hubbard's Tale*—Spenser as a sonneteer—The *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*—The *Faerie Queene*, and its stanza—A true prosodic entity—The diction—Capacities of the stanza, internal and co-operative 350

INTERCHAPTER IV 370

APPENDICES (I. Equivalence, etc.; II. Common Syllables; III. Doggerel; IV. Alliteration; V. Feet—1200-1600; VI. Metres, do.; VII. Pause, do.; VIII. Rhyme, do.; IX. Vowel-Music, do.) 381

INDEX 423

GLOSSARIOLUM TECHNICUM

For excuse of this short hand-list see Preface. It is confined to words of frequent occurrence. Others are in Index.

Anacrusis.—A half-foot or syllable prefixed to the regular metrical scheme. In English, though there are examples of pure anacrusis, it generally takes the form of a monosyllabic foot which *may be* included in the scheme. Some have proposed to call it "catch."

Arsis.—This term, and its correlative *thesis*, are rather differently, and sometimes contradictorily, used by prosodists. I use it always as meaning the lengthening caused by raising or emphasising the voice, and *thesis* as the contrary process, or occasion, of shortening by drop or slip.

Cæsura.—At one time an odd habit existed in English of using this as equivalent to "elision." I always use it as = "pause," and as = the most important pause in the line, if there are more pauses than one. In classical scansion the cæsuras are usually *penthemimeral*, *i.e.* at the fifth syllable, or *hephthemimeral*, at the seventh. See note p. 270.

Catalexis.—In the use of this term (literally "leaving off") and its derivatives there are also some variations. In the following pages it always means, when used generally, defect *or* excess at the *end* of a line. *Catalectic* simply means that a syllable is wanting; *brachycatalectic* that a whole foot is so; *hypercatalectic* that there is a syllable *over*.

Dimeter, etc. (see note p. 169).—It is usual in Greek to employ this notation of anapæsts as well as of iambics. The English anapæst is, however, as a rule, a rather bulkier foot than the Greek, and when used as a base is less frequently shortened by equivalence. There is, therefore, some excuse for using "tetrameter" here, though there *is* an anapæstic tetrameter proper in Aristophanes.

Epanaphora.—Beginning successive clauses or verses with the same word or phrase. It must be distinguished from *epanorthosis*, which means picking up a word again to play on, or emphasise it.

Equivalence and *substitution.* See Appendix.

Feet.—Most of these are familiar to everybody, but some are not, so that it may be well to give a full list:—*Pyrrhic*, ⏑ ⏑; *Iamb*, ⏑ –; *Trochee*, – ⏑; *Spondee*, – –; *Tribrach*, ⏑ ⏑ ⏑; *Molossus*, – – –; *Anapæst*, ⏑ ⏑ –; *Dactyl*, – ⏑ ⏑; *Cretic*, – ⏑ –; *Amphibrach*, ⏑ – ⏑; *Bacchic*, – – ⏑; *Antibacchic*, ⏑ – –; *Pæon*, ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ –, the odd syllable taking each of the four possible positions; *Epitrite*, – – – ⏑, ditto; *Choriamb*, – ⏑ ⏑ –; *Antispast*, ⏑ – – ⏑; *Ionic a minore*, ⏑ ⏑ – –; *Ionic a majore*, – – ⏑ ⏑; *Di-iamb*, ⏑ – ⏑ –; *Ditrochee*, – ⏑ – ⏑; *Dochmiac*, a five-syllable foot most commonly ⏑ – – ⏑ –, but of course largely variable.

BOOK I

THE PERIOD OF THE ORIGINS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

The Title—Definition of subject—Matters barred or subordinated—The matter preferred, and the method to be applied to it—The time concerned—Illustrations from Professor Skeat on Guest and Chaucer—Antecedent Prosodies—Anglo-Saxon—Latin—Its divergent lessons—The earlier or "classical" metre—The later "accentual" rhythm—The clash of Rhythm and Metre—Rhyme—Greek (?)—French and Provençal—Scandinavian—Celtic—Summary.

§ 1. Definition of the Subject

I HAVE called the book which I am proposing to write, *A History of English Prosody*, after some deliberate consideration of alternatives. "History of English *Rhythms*" is not only a title preoccupied by the best-known and (with all its faults) by far the best book existing on the subject—that of Dr. Guest—but it was used in that book with such a definitely polemical, if not actually question-begging, intention that it could hardly be thought of. And "History of English *Metre*," which for some time I preferred, seems to be open to complementary objections. It might be taken as aggressive on the opposite side to Dr. Guest's attack; and if one guarded against this, there would be the serious logical difficulty that we have to deal with some things to which the term "metre" can only be applied by a great stretch of propriety. "History of English *Versification*" is free from these objections, but might seem to promise a more theoretical handling than I intend, for reasons to be shortly exposed; The Title.

and "History of English *Verse*" would be too large, and might be taken to signify some competition with Warton and my friend Mr. Courthope. "Prosody," on the other hand,—except to those who take fright or offence at anything that even suggests the influence of the classical languages in this matter,—seems entirely *anodyne*, the term having long been used in all languages, modern as well as ancient, for a division of, or a supplement to, Grammar, and carrying no treacherous or question-begging connotation with it.

Definition of subject.

It is, however, still desirable to set down exactly the signification which it is intended to attach to the word, or, to put the thing differently, the extent of claim which it is intended to mark out on the subject. The inclusion will be found tolerably wide, I think, but there will be throughout one exclusion which I fear may possibly be resented or contemned, judging from the eager attention which has been bestowed upon the matter excluded by many, if not most, who have handled the subject itself. I do not propose, in these pages, to take a side upon, to argue out, or (except when it meets us unavoidably in connection with some of the questions mooted) to refer at all to the problem so frequently and hotly discussed, with, as some think, such very little effect, as to the particular agency which constitutes that difference of the value of syllables out of which rhythm and metre are made. That there *is* such a difference, and that out of it rhythm and metre are constituted, not merely in English, but in every European language known to us, hardly the very rage of controversy will, I suppose, deny. The first line of the *Æneid* and the first line of the Caedmonian or Pseudo-Caedmonian *Genesis*, any stanza of Sappho and any versicle of Walt Whitman, alike consist of what till recently nobody hesitated to call "longs and shorts"—of two classes of sound-values (possibly subdividable into minor classes, but broadly distinguished each from other) the juxtaposition of which, on no matter what system, constitutes what most people call poetry, and what all who use the terms call rhythmical and metrical writing.

Matters barred or subordinated.

On what, in turn, constitutes this difference I do not propose, unless *obiter* or accidentally, or when dealing historically with those who have discussed it, to say one word in this book. I call the two classes "longs" and "shorts" without the very slightest innuendo or insinuation that I believe the source of difference to be the greater length of time, the greater *quantity*, in the technical sense, of the one as compared with the other. I do not, if any one cares for my opinion, think that "length" and "shortness" always or strictly *do* constitute the difference. Neither do I think that "stress" or "slur," that "weight" or "lightness," supplies the universal cause; nor that "sharpness" or absence of sharpness, nor that "strength" or "weakness" does so; nor that any of the other pairs of opposites which have been suggested will suffice. All these oppositions may now and then be acceptable enough; in many cases combinations of them may exist. But to me all this is a previous question, and one in the solution of which I am wholly uninterested, not least because I do not think it possible.

The matter preferred,

Therefore the battle of Accent *v.* Quantity,[1] which seems to interest most writers on Prosody so much, will, except historically, make very little figure in this book. I think, I must confess, that most persons who have used these words combatively have, as Mr. Matthew Arnold most falsely and unjustly said of another matter, "got ruffled by fighting" till they have really forgotten what the words they use mean. When I speak of Prosody I mean: *The laws and variations observable in the rhythmical and metrical grouping of sets of the two values just referred to.* And I call these two values "long" and "short" just as I might call them "Abracadabra" and "Abraxas"—absolutely without prejudice or preference to any theory of the exact process by which the one becomes Abraxas or the other Abracadabra.

and the method to be applied to it.

On the other hand, we shall endeavour to enquire

[1] Once more I shall be perfectly frank and state my own opinion, which is that in English accent is *a cause of* quantity, but not the only cause, and not a stable one. See App. on "Common Syllables."

exactly and faithfully, from the very beginning of what can fairly be called English literature, what the arrangements of these two base-values have been, and how the manipulation of them has effected (or, to be entirely impartial, has coincided with) improvement, or deterioration, or stationary quality in English poetry. To put the matter in yet another light, the subject of our enquiries will be Architecture, not Petrology; Painting, not the enquiry into the chemical constitution of colours; Art, not Science. But we shall find it possible and desirable, if not positively necessary, to include in our enquiries all important previous enquiries into the subject, because these constitute a very important part of the actual history thereof.

The time concerned.

The system of temporal limitation requires less comment. The distinction between Anglo-Saxon and English is one of those things which escape the too curious enquirer, but present no difficulties to the *communis sensus*; and this distinction is never more unmistakable by the latter than in the case of verse. Exactly how the islands may be dotted across the Behring Straits of 1000-1200 the philologist may be left to settle for himself. It is certain that between the poems of the Exeter Book, which roughly represent the further shore, and the work of Layamon, for instance, which represents the hither, a gulf is fixed, so far as we can judge, far mightier than that between the poems of perhaps seven centuries earlier and those of 1000, than, as we more or less know, that between the poems of seven actual centuries later and those of 1200. From the hither shore, therefore, we begin, yet not without consideration of the further, or of the islands between, or of the possible assistances to communication.

Lastly, the unchanging purpose of the book is, and will be, to let the texts and the facts tell their own story; and to submit, in all intelligent interpretation, to that story absolutely. The writer has had some practice in literary history, and, whatever his dose of original sin, whatever his accumulation of self-sought corruption, ought

to know something about it by this time. He is convinced that the greatest of all dangers, the things to be avoided much more than a rock from which you may escape only damaged, and as much as a whirlpool wherein you will be wholly whelmed, are, firstly, the "must have been," the assumption of convenient but unknown facts, and the suppression of inconvenient though known ones; secondly, the attempt to dictate to great artists, the preposterous theory of the "monstrous beauty," the disqualification of the player because he has not played an artificial game. Rhythm and metre, accent and quantity, sections here and sections there, strict syllabic identity and elastic syllabic equivalence,—all are good when they appear in the making of good poetry, none are good when they appear in—much more when they have apparently caused—the making of poetry that is bad. Nobody, in the study of literature, should be afraid of having his heart grieved with anything that is truly shown to his eyes. For it is only fear that hath torment, and the love of literature, like other loves, casts out fear altogether.[1]

I shall perhaps best illustrate the principles on which this book will proceed as well as, incidentally, the extreme difficulties which are introduced in the discussion of prosodic matters by the difference of the eyes with which men see, and the difference of the ears with which they hear, from two criticisms of my friend Professor Skeat, than whom it would be impossible for me to mention any living authority on English with sincerer honour, respect, and (both for public and private help) gratitude.

Illustrations from Professor Skeat on Guest and Chaucer.

The first is the following passage from Dr. Skeat's Preface to Guest:—

[1] I do not know whether I ought to add a third danger, my own attempt to avoid which will no doubt, as it has done already, provoke or grieve the excellent persons who always desiderate "philosophical" treatment of a subject. I have dared their anger and their sorrow before, and must, however regretfully, dare them again. Probably an abstract handling of Prosody is *possible*—the mathematical element in it prevents difficulty in allowing that. But such a handling is not the task which I have set myself. I may say, without flippancy, *qui l'aime le suive.* He should even, if he will condescend to do so, receive considerable assistance in his quest from the results of my humbler enquiries.

The mark | so constantly used throughout the book to indicate the scansion invariably marks *the accented syllables*, and is *not* used to mark the division into feet as in the case of Greek and Latin verses. It is, in fact, only another way of marking accent, used in place of the more usual, but far more clumsy, method of employing marks of accentuation. Thus it is the same thing whether we write

When | the Bri|tish war|rior queen |

or whether we write

Whén the Brítish wárrior quéen.

. . . Yet, when Dr. Guest correctly scans a certain line thus—

In | the hexam|eter ri|ses: the foun|tain's sil|very col|umn,

it is curious to find a MS. note in Mr. Swifte's copy to this effect: "I think the proper scansion of this line is

In the hex|ameter | rises the | fountain's | silvery | column."

That is to say, Mr. Swifte "corrects" the author by scanning the line *exactly the same as before*: he has merely employed the symbol | in a sense of his own, by dividing the line into feet in the usual schoolboy fashion.

The other passage is from a note to Chaucer's *Boethius*, Metre 1, last two lines—

O ye, my frendes, what or wherto avauntede ye me to ben weleful?
For he that hath fallen stood nat in stedefast degree,

which represent in Latin—

Quid me felicem toties jactastis amici?
Qui cecidit stabili non erat ille gradu.

The note is :—

With regard to the last sentence, Mr. Stewart remarks in his essay on Boethius, that Chaucer here "actually reproduces the original metre, *i.e.* a hexameter and pentameter." The true M.E. pronunciation must, for this purpose, be entirely neglected, which amounts to saying that Chaucer must have been profoundly unconscious of any such intention.

Now these passages are very curious. It is not necessary to dwell on the perhaps slightly question-begging description of the usual accentual marking as "clumsy," or upon the strange supposition that another mark, which if it has any meaning at all means division, does not divide. The point to which I wish to draw attention is

Professor Skeat's assertion that the method of scansion which poor Mr. Swifte suggested in his "schoolboy" fashion is "exactly the same" as Dr. Guest's, and (I suppose) that the actual division of the first line of *Boadicea* is "exactly the same" as if it were divided,

When the | British | Warrior | Queen.

Let us examine this. According to the system of prosody which I, like Mr. Swifte, adopt and understand, the Guestian division of the two lines makes the *Boadicea* line iambic and the Coleridge line anapæstic; and as a matter of fact I think the latter right, while I think the first wrong. But how can they be "exactly the same"? The respective rhythms in the first case are :—

A	B
When	When the
the Brit-	British
ish War-	Warrior
rior Queen.	Queen.

In the second :—

A	B
In	In the hex-
the hexam-	ameter
eter ri-	rises the
ses the fount-	fountain's
ain's sil-	silvery
very col-	column.
umn.	

I lay no stress on the division of words, which I do not think a very important point, though some persons of worship think otherwise, and which, as it happens, cuts different ways. I think Mr. Swifte is right in his division of the hexameter, *supposing that an English dactyl is possible*, which, in continuous scansion, I do not believe. But these things are questions of taste. What seems to me to be not a question of taste at all, but one which lies at the absolute foundation of any possible theory of prosody, is whether Professor Skeat is right, or whether he is wrong, in regarding the two systems as "exactly the same." To my ear, as also to my eye and my mind, they are irreconcilably different. The base-rhythms of the two

plans are diametrically opposed, the poetical effect is entirely unlike, and I can hardly perceive any concordat or compromise as to English verse being possible between those who perceive, and those who do not perceive, this difference.

The other case is of a conveniently different kind. Again, I shall not dwell on the point that "the true pronunciation of Middle English" is very mainly guess-work — resting on ingenious hypotheses not a century old.[1] Never mind that. What we are asked to believe is that Chaucer, translating a certain rhythm, and apparently reproducing that rhythm, was not consciously (or even, I suppose, *un*consciously) reproducing it at all.

Now observe this. The Latin hexameter is a very artificial arrangement, and it is x to one that it could be reproduced accidentally. The Latin pentameter is a still more artificial rhythm, and it is y to one that it could be so reproduced. But the two combined are of such an artificiality, that for any one to have them before him and to reproduce them without conscious *or unconscious* echo is an improbability, the odds against which I must leave to some member of Professor Skeat's University to work out, for a mere Oxonian's mathematics are not equal to it.

But an illustration is always something of a digression, though this digression was, I think, worth making. I need but partly add, and partly repeat, that my object is here to examine, in chronological order, the practice and the theories of English Prosody which have actually existed in the seven centuries between 1200 and 1900; that so far as I myself start with a working theory of Prosody, it is that it consists of arrangements of certain factors which are themselves juxtapositions of sound-values of (generally

[1] It has been objected to me that we *do* know, and not guess, that "weleful" was trisyllabic, and so on. But I think I can hit this ball well to the boundary. In Chaucer's time, if not by Chaucer, we know that these *e*'s were getting obliterated, and whatever he might do in deliberate verse, he might easily neglect them in a mere vague haunting echo of memory. Indeed, he seems actually to have written "welful" elsewhere. (Observe that I do not say he "intended" to reproduce the rhythm.)

speaking) two different kinds ; that by calling these sound-values "long" and "short" I do not intend to beg the question as to their origin and differentia ; and that in calling their combinations or arrangements generally "feet," and individually or specifically by the names of iamb, anapæst, and the like, by using such other terms of classical prosody as catalexis, anacrusis, and so forth, I am again taking no liberty and spreading no snare. The accent-man may, wherever he pleases, substitute for my "iamb" "combination of unaccented and accented syllables" ; the stress-man for my "anapæst" "unit of two unstressed and one stressed syllable" ; the disciple of Ellis one of his chains of "super-strong," "sub-weak," etc., for my "dimeter" and my "heroic." If, on such substitution, it be found that I have ignored any elench, begged any question, taken any unfair advantage, I shall give up the passage altogether. In so far as I appeal to any tribunal, it is that of the fairly sensitive and well-trained ear. How would such an ear "scan" (again with no malice in the word) each line? and when such an ear has pronounced, what most rational rationale presents itself as a formula to express the scansion? Of the answers to these questions, and the working-out necessary to get those answers, I hope to make the stuff and substance of this book.

§ 2. "The Mothers"

Among the influences, conscious or unconscious, actual or possible, which must or may have acted upon an Englishman desirous of writing English verse in the twelfth century, the antecedent prosodies of the languages with which he was acquainted, or which had in this or that way worked upon the language he was using, must, of course, hold a great place, and for our purpose almost the greatest. They may be said to be five in number—(A) Anglo-Saxon, (B) Latin (with a faint possibility of Greek), (C) French, (D) Scandinavian, and (E) Celtic. The part played by the first three is certain and all-important ; that of the

Antecedent Prosodies.

last two much smaller, and in any direct fashion rather problematical, but scarcely to be quite neglected.

A. Anglo-Saxon

Anglo-Saxon.

The assignment of the first place among these to Anglo-Saxon [1] is not merely conventional, nor is it in any sense perfidious. It is true that some of the most serious errors (as they seem to the present writer) which have ever crept into the discussion of English prosody, have come from a too obstinate determination to serve that prosody heir, at all costs and in all points, to Anglo-Saxon. It is also true that, as I think we shall see, what has been by an engaging absurdity called "the rhythm of the foreigner" has in the main superseded the rhythm of this by no means aboriginal native. But, in the first place, the language which supplies the main stuff and substance of all English speech, and which supplied all but an infinitesimal proportion of it at the time when our enquiries proper begin, cannot but have a prerogative position. And, as we shall see, Anglo-Saxon supplied much more than the materials; it supplied an invaluable *differentiating* element from "the rhythm of the foreigner" in perhaps the most important of all points, the point which has given English poetry most of its predominant and incomparable beauty.

As is pretty generally known, Anglo-Saxon prosody, though in one sense by no means simple, is in another simplicity itself. With rare and late exceptions, the whole body of Anglo-Saxon verse reduces itself to a single form which was practically identical in principle in all the cognate languages—English, German, and Scandinavian.

[1] In the remarks which follow, the laws assigned to Anglo-Saxon verse are drawn up so as to exhibit not the writer's private opinions, but the consensus of the best modern scholars. The comments are those of one who does not pretend to professional Anglo-Saxon "scholarship" himself, but who has read all printed Anglo-Saxon poetry carefully. They are those of one who has read Middle English and Modern English verse as to the manner born. Although it is sometimes thought illiberal to lay stress on this advantage, I believe it to be all-important. The Welsh critic who, the other day, observed that a Welsh postman could correct the work on Welsh prosody of the best Celtic scholar in France, may have shown something of the proverbial "cenfigenousness" of his race in expression; but I fancy he was right in fact.

The staple line of this verse consists of two halves or sections, each containing two "long," "strong," "stressed," "accented" syllables, these same syllables being, to the extent of three out of the four, alliterated. At the first casting of the eye on a page of Anglo-Saxon poetry no common *resemblances* except these seem to emerge. But we see on some pages an altogether extraordinary *difference* in the lengths of the lines or, in other words, of the number of "short," "weak," "unstressed," "unaccented" syllables which are allowed to group themselves round the pivots or posts of the rhythm. Yet attempts have been made, not without fair success, to divide the sections or half-lines into groups or types of rhythm, more or less capable of being represented by the ordinary marks of metrical scansion.[1]

These, however, though in the sections, or in parts of them, something like our rhythm-bars may be seen, never for long together, and very seldom even as individual wholes, give us rhythm corresponding to ours. The difference between a passage of Langland and a passage of Chaucer appears everywhere, and of course even more strikingly, between a passage of any Anglo-Saxon poet and one of any modern. A sort of monotone or hum, generally of what we call trochaic type, less frequently of what we call dactylic or anapæstic, will indeed disengage itself for the attentive reader. But nothing more, look where he will and school his ear as carefully as he may, in Caedmon and Cynewulf, in *Beowulf* and *Byrhtnoth*, everywhere and in everything. The sharp and uncompromising section, the accents, the alliteration—these are all that the poet has to trust to in the way of rules *sine queis non.* But before long the said careful reader becomes aware that there is a "lucky licence," which is as a rule, and much more also;

[1] The standard authority on the subject is, of course, E. Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik*, Halle, 1893. Herr Sievers, with others many and reverend, would make the correspondence of groups much more exact than it used to be thought, and it is urged that some combinations of syllables *never* occur. If so, so much the better for the theory of the present book, which can, however, do without it. For an excellent summary account see Mr. W. P. Ker, *The Dark Ages*, Edinburgh, 1904, p. 228 *sq.*

and that this licence—itself by no means merely licentious—concerns the allowance of unaccented and unalliterated syllables. The range of it is so great that on a single page-opening, taken at random, you may find the lines varying from nine to fifteen syllables, and, seeking a little farther, come to a variation between eight and twenty-one. Such contrasts are of course exceptional, but the contrast as such, and its principles such as they are, are the rule—the fourth rule after a fashion, as we have said. Middle pause, so strong as to be more than pause only, alliteration, accent, and substitution of equivalenced groups instead of rigid syllabic uniformity—these are the four pillars of the structure of Anglo-Saxon prosody.

B. Latin

Latin.

There should be very little reasonable doubt that no *preceptist* example in the prosody of Early Middle English had half the force of that of Latin. That Latin was the "Grammatica"[1]—the pattern literary language—of all nations in the Middle Ages admits of no question. That it was practically the only language in which these nations had finished literary examples before them admits of as little. But in regard to English, there is the important additional fact that the first Englishman who attained a distinct literary position had composed a treatise in versification which, according to his lights, embodied the traditional ideas of Latin prosody in so far as they were received and receivable by the time. Bede's *Ars Metrica* was certainly the main, and not improbably the only, treatise on the subject that any Englishman of fair education was likely to know for some five hundred years after the date of its composition. And it reflected—through Victorinus, Audax, Mallius Theodorus, and others, as far back, at least, as Terentianus Maurus—ideas derived from the best classical times, mingled with others derived from times which, in the common estimate, are not so good.

Any reader of this treatise, however, and any student

[1] Cf. Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquio.*

of the subject, with or without a treatise to assist him, but availing himself of the actual Latin poetry at his disposal, must have been, whether he chose to admit it or not, puzzled, and, unless he was a person of extraordinary genius, might have been misled, by the fact that this Latin poetry presented examples of verse constructed on two almost wholly different systems. There was, on the one hand, the system of "classical" prosody, of which the best examples, from Virgil to Claudian, were perfectly well known to even the darkest of the "Dark" ages. Although a thorough and experimental acquaintance with this is not so common as it would have been fifty or even thirty years ago, it cannot be necessary, in the introductory matter of a book like the present, to give a minute account of it to any probable reader. Derived—directly and as a matter of acquiescent learning and deliberate imitation derived—from Greek, it presented a series of orderly arrangements in certain prosodic forms, of syllables, the greater number of which by far were definitely accounted beforehand as "long" or "short"; while of the rest almost all in Latin, as compared with a somewhat smaller proportion in Greek, had their length or shortness determined for them by the circumstances of their *position*—by the number or character of the consonants which followed the particular vowel in its actual collocation.

Its divergent lessons.

The earlier or "classical" metre.

The units thus classified beforehand were to be arranged in certain schemes of metrical adjustment. Some of these, such as the Alcaic and Sapphic, admitted, in Latin, of no variation, except by elision—the technical disappearance or occultation of a final syllable, under certain fixed rules, before the initial one of the next word. The number of syllables in a line was here always the same; the order of long and short syllables—in other words, the arrangement in "feet"—was invariable likewise. Others, such as the hexameter and some forms of the iambic trimeter, were arranged on a principle of greater licence. Taking, generally but not in detail, the equivalence of one long syllable to two short as granted, "feet"—collocations of one long and a short, of one short and a long, of a long and two shorts,

of two longs, of three shorts, and of two shorts and a long —might, on conditions more or less rigid, be substituted for each other. But these licences were in every case curbed by rules, not so much arbitrary as deduced from the necessities of keeping the general character of the line; and in no case, save in the comparatively rare one of a "common" syllable, or in virtue of those changes of position which were themselves rigidly defined, might the intrinsic quality-quantity of a syllable, the character of the prosodic integer, be tampered with.

The later "accentual" rhythm.

Such were the laws of the severer muses of Latin—examples of which, as has been said, were before every writer of any education from the first civilisation of the outlying European peoples to the period at which our book properly begins. But every such writer in every such nation had before him, at the same time, examples, in some cases even better known to him, of poetry written in the same language, but governed by an entirely different system of versification. In Italy itself the Graeco-Roman prosody had been merely superimposed upon one based on quite different principles. Not merely were the collocations of longs and shorts in the so-called "Saturnian" metres (and perhaps in others) arranged on much simpler and less elaborately varied principles, but the inviolability of intrinsic quantity (which had already in Greek been much less[1] than in literary Latin) was of extremely little account. The stress or slur of the voice —the lilt of the accompanying music—were allowed to make long short and short long with almost entire complaisance; and to some slight extent this liberty was allowed to encroach on regular metres, such as the iambic, which approached nearest to the popular forms.

The results of this, revived and in turn imposed on "metre" in a fashion which does not directly concern us, our man of 1200 was constantly hearing in the services of the Church, and, if he was a reading man, often meeting in

[1] I know that some excellent scholars demur to this. But for me the well-known *locus* of Martial (ix. [11] 12) settles the question, and I see no reason to limit it to proper names. (See Appendix, "Common Syllables.")

manuscript specimens of sacred and profane verse. The lowest term to which the line could be cut down—the syllable—had an extraordinary promiscuity of values, determined apparently by accent, by musical setting or suggestion, and by many other things, besides or contrary to the original prosodic quantification; but the next superior unit, the "foot," was in quite a different position. It was clearly upon *it* that the scansion depended; you could take with it either no liberties at all, or liberties in the older forms strongly determined by the laws of equivalence. And this establishment and consecration of the foot communicated an unmistakable rhythmical swing. Further, in this later prosody there was present something which was not usual in Classical nor, save late and rarely, present in Anglo-Saxon prosody—that is to say, Rhyme. And it could not require any remarkable acuteness to decide (whether consciously or unconsciously) that this rhyme in the first place bound and clenched the rhythm, emphasised and ensured its recurrence, in a very convenient fashion; in the second, that it accompanied line and rhythm with an added music no less agreeable than convenient. The exact origin and progress of the rhythmical reversion and the rhyme-innovation are very speculative questions.

The clash of Rhythm and Metre.

When, by the results of the vast extension of the later Roman Republic and the earlier Roman Empire, Rome became the political and literary centre of the Western world, the Latin language necessarily became the at least secondary speech of education and means of conversation to nations whose languages differed indeed very much from each other, but differed in most, if not in all cases, even more from Latin. All, beyond question, learnt the great examples of Roman poetry; all naturally endeavoured to imitate them; all, as a matter of inevitable consequence, found the gravest innovations necessary. It may have looked at first as if mere chaos and barbarism would be the result; as a matter of fact the earliest result that we possess *is* very nearly chaotic, and is quite barbaric. The hexameters of Commodian, an African bishop of the earliest fourth century, are among the greatest curiosities

of literature.[1] By entirely neglecting the classical qualities of the words and syllables used, they can be got into batches of spondees and dactyls which are numerically satisfactory. But this neglect of quantity, whether intrinsic or positional, as well as the other neglect of such laws as that of elision, is an absolute necessity. With the right quantities, and observing the right laws, Commodian's lines become mere ruinous heaps, destitute not only of any metre, but of any rhythm, mere handfuls not so much of prose as of possible materials of prose. And when the severer metres were attempted in this fashion, something not unlike the same result continued to be produced for more than another thousand years.

But Order, if not the first law of earth, as it is said to be of Heaven, never takes very long to establish itself even here below; and it was quite impossible that nations which were teeming with poetry, and which were naturally tempted to express themselves poetically in what they could not help regarding as the noblest of tongues—the tongue of their rulers, the tongue, before long, of the dominant religion, the only tongue that enabled a man to conceal or reveal his thoughts wherever he was—should content themselves with the mere "pigeon"-metre of the African bishop. It is not the business of this book to attempt a conjectural—there can probably never be a certain—reconstruction of the steps of method, and the selection of material, which led to the rhythmical Latin prosody of the Middle Ages—one of the most exquisitely artificial-natural of all prosodic systems, and one lending itself, with a divine indifference, to poetry and to doggerel. As observed experimentally throughout the productions of a thousand years, of which the hymns of the Latin Church are the noblest, and the "Goliardic" poems the most amusing examples, it has two main characteristics, both of which must have presented themselves

[1] Here is one :—

Respuis infelix bonum disciplinae caelestis,

where the propriety of the quantification as far as the cæsura sets off the anarchy which follows it.

to the more or less distinct and distinguishing consciousness of a fairly educated person in any European country during the twelfth century, while both were kept by the services of the Church in the ears, if not exactly in the minds, of the most uneducated. The first of these was the great phenomenon of rhyme; the other was a modification, very difficult to express in scientific terminology, but exceedingly easy to seize, and not very difficult to reproduce in practice, of the exact quantitative measures of classical poetry, selected, in the first place, with a mainly instinctive but extraordinarily felicitous eclecticism, and modified, in the second, after a fashion showing nothing short of inspiration.[1]

Rhyme.

The exact origin of rhyme is another of those points which Fate, or Logic, or, if anybody pleases, Pusillanimity, dispenses us from attacking. The more probable, though it is certainly not the favourite, opinion seems to be that rhyme, of which symptoms, if not full examples, are found in the early poetry of most parts of the world, and which is not absent from formal Greek and Latin verse itself, was kept out of this formal poetry by the simple fact that its main function of "time-beating"—of marking, emphasising, and accompanying the poetic division—was in these cases made superfluous by the extreme accomplishment of the metrical system. It stands equally to reason that, when it makes its appearance, this formal accomplishment should in turn be revised, as in any case it must evidently have been, owing to the different intonation, or rather intonations, natural to the new models.[2]

These intonations themselves must have had most to do with the selection of the metres to be rhythmed, and the particular alterations applied in the process of rhythmicising. But Church music and Church service, on the

[1] Among the innumerable but here irrelevant points of interest may be noted the way in which different nations suited accentual Latin poetry *to their own accent*. See this, which many must have dimly thought, well and I think first expressed, in Mr. Ker's *Dark Ages*, p. 202 *sq*. I believe he had been led to notice it first, as I had myself, by Baudelaire's poem, *Franciscae meae laudes*, modern as that is.

[2] See note above.

one hand, and the aggregation of students from all parts of Europe in the centres of study on the other, seem to have effected a sort of common measure of prosodic values ;[1] and while it is notorious that the exact nationality of most of the comic, bacchic, and amatory poetry of the two centuries just referred to is extremely dubious, it is not really possible to discern any difference corresponding to the known nationality of the authors of the great hymns. It would probably be impossible to effect, and would certainly be very dangerous to attempt, too many mediate generalisations in reference to the alterations preferred. The commonest feet (putting aside the combinations of four or even five syllables admitted by ancient prosody), in that prosody itself, had been iamb, trochee, and spondee among dissyllabic, dactyl, and anapæst among trisyllabic feet. But the spondee, though by no means, as some have thought, an unknown modern foot (it would be interesting to know how any correct pronunciation of "humdrum" or "randan" can make either anything but a spondee), is not common[2] in the modern tongues, and in mediæval Latin, at any rate, the trochee and the anapæst have a greater relative prominence than in ancient. The systems, or schemes of arrangement, were exceedingly numerous, and sometimes of such complication that, without musical accompaniment, they have an air of non-naturalness. But the most ancient and the most popular are simple enough, such as the universally used and extremely effective adjustment of acatalectic and catalectic trochaic dimeters—

Pone luctum, Magdalena,
Et serena lacrimas,

which is for some purposes no doubt better arranged in one "fifteener"; as its shortened variety of catalectic and brachycatalectic which gives the still more popular *thirteener*—

Meum mihi est propositum in taberna mori ;

[1] Again with exceptions.

[2] Milton, however, was certainly fond of it, and so were others, as we shall see.

as the galloping dactylic tetrameter—

Fumus et mulier et stillicidia.

But both in these and in almost all others there are noticeable two, perhaps three, things. The first is that syllabic uniformity is more strictly observed than ever—so much so that even elision is distinctly eschewed. The second is that these comparatively or wholly rigid syllabic lengths are cut up into feet as rigid. The third is that in the selection of the syllables that make up these feet, classical quantity is ignored in degrees which may seem to vary, but which in all probability are reducible to one single norm—that of an elastic, but by no means indefinitely elastic, *pronunciation*.

In other words, and not to dwell on a subject which, intensely interesting as it is, is not *our* subject, the supposed educated Englishman of 1100-1200, looking at his Ovid, and at any poems that happened to be then written in accent-Latin, would find that in both cases the movement of the verse was separable into definite and the same units, but that the parts which composed these were apparently selected on quite different principles. He would (or he might) notice that the rhythm of such a line as

Miraque res, media subito tenus exstitit alvo

(*Met.* xiii. 893) was, as far as the first six words are concerned, identical with that of

Cur mundus militat sub vana gloria

(always supposing that this poem was, as it may have been, written by 1200). But if he was a really observant person he would also observe that Ovid never uses, for such a rhythmical or metrical effect, such combinations of syllables as *cur mundus* or *sub vana*, and that while *militat* actually does, and *gloria* in a different case may often do, such duty with him, he would carefully abstain from beginning the next word to *militat* with a consonant, or making *gloria* an oblique case. The observer would, also,

at least possibly observe that in his own pronunciation and intonation these refinements were rather superfluous. What practical conclusions he might draw will be matter of future consideration for us.

B2. Greek (?)

Greek (?).

If anybody at the same time had had any Greek before him (which is improbable, but not quite impossible),[1] he would have found the same state of things prevailing in a more aggravated dichotomy. *Classical* Greek literature would have presented itself to him with an initial and continuing superiority of freedom, in respect of common quantity of syllables and of "equivalent" adjustment of combined feet, but with a system on the whole as regular. *Modern* Greek literature would have shown the process which was going on in Latin, repeated, anticipated, or paralleled (for the facts are extremely hard to decide upon), in a way systematically similar, but very inferior in actual result. There is not the slightest reason (such as is sometimes alleged as due to the prejudice arising from familiarity with classical models) why the hexameters of Tzetzes, the iambics of Theodorus Prodromus, and the accentual fifteeners of Manasses, should not be at least as attractive and acceptable as the carolling and chanting hexameters of Bernard of Morlaix, the solemn iambics of a hundred hymn-writers, and the tripping and laughing thirteeners of Mapes, or whosoever may have stood for "Golias." They are, in fact, not merely not acceptable, but ineffably disgusting. And though no such phrase can be applied to the Greek hymns at their best, yet they seldom rise to the splendour and the "cry" of the Latin—thereby exactly reversing classical experience. From the point of view of mere prosody, however, this does not matter. The help or the hindrance provided by Greek would have been, in rare and doubtful cases, exactly the same as that provided by Latin in cases innumerable

[1] In the *Dark* Ages we find a good deal of rather "pigeon" Greek; less in the early *Middle*.

and indubitable. The student, or the listener, or the reader would have been provided with schemes, forms, practices, sometimes of a rigid, and always of a carefully adjusted character.

C. French and Provençal[1]

French and Provençal.

The third prosody, French, with which in some examples, at least, he had many chances, and at most some certainty, of being familiar, presented qualities not new or different, but differently combined and adjusted. There was rhyme, either perfect or imperfect (assonance), which distinguished it sharply from Anglo-Saxon; and there was also a recurrent and diffused rhythm which distinguished it therefrom at least as strongly. There was —as distinguishing it from at least the classical form of Latin, and still more remarkably from *all* forms of Anglo-Saxon—an almost, if not quite, universal refusal to admit any inequality or equivalence of syllables in the line. Number of syllables seemed to count alone. But there was, superadded to this, a sharp cæsura such as had existed in the classical, but did not always exist in the later, Latin, and which corresponded to the "sections" of Anglo-Saxon; and there was an arrangement, not quite to be paralleled in either of these languages, that of buckling, by similarity of rhyme or assonance, a large—sometimes a very large—number of lines into a sort of largest integer (the *laisse* or *tirade*), corresponding to the smaller stanza-integers which were found in Latin verses and poems of the modern type. Furthermore, in French (and in its southern sister, Provençal, perhaps still more) there was a fancy for elaborating lyrical forms of great intricacy, making the Sapphics and Alcaics of the ancients quite simple things in comparison, and for the device of the *refrain*, so natural to uncivilised poetry, and so charming, where rightly used, in poetry civilised as well as uncivilised.

[1] The habit, common in linguistic scholars, of sharply separating Northern and Southern French is not literary.

D. Scandinavian

Scandinavian.

This prosody certainly had influence on the later Anglo-Saxon verse, especially in the famous *Rhyming Poem*, and from political and ethnological causes must have exercised a good deal (perhaps unconsciously and indirectly) on at least the northern parts of England. Its basis had originally been identical with that of Anglo-Saxon, or very closely allied to it. But it had even earlier proved susceptible to the attraction of rhyme, which Anglo-Saxon resisted with such curious stoutness; it was more definitely metrical in its rhythm, more regular, and much more inclined to the stanza, which in Anglo-Saxon we hardly find save, thanks to its refrain, in *Deor*. And before very long it settled itself into the artificial forms of what is called, by a very misleading and objectionable, but now almost accredited title, "*Court*-Poetry."

E. Celtic

Celtic.

Last, and least known to the present writer, but fortunately of least probable effect, come the prosodies of the "Celtic fringe." Irish and, still more, Welsh poetry is famous for the extreme intricacy of its verse-laws, but scholars now roundly declare that the oldest Irish we have is based upon accentual Latin. And though it would seem that the famous Welsh triad or triplet may be autochthonous, the more elaborate forms, the "four-and-twenty measures," probably owe their origin to the genius of the race and language, no doubt, but to that genius working upon Latin suggestions. If any formal influence was exercised on Middle English (there can be no reasonable doubt that some of the *matter* of Layamon and others comes from Celtic sources), it must have been chiefly in the suggestion of intricate stanza arrangements, and especially in the internal rhymes quaintly interwoven, where, however, an awkward reminder of Latin again comes in.[1]

[1] We will not here discuss the vexed question whether rhyme was given by Celtic to Latin or by Latin to Celtic. I have very little doubt about it; but here it does not matter, for the Englishman of 1200 was certain to get *his* notions of rhyme from Latin or French, not from Irish or Welsh.

Summary.

Let us then briefly resume the influences which were at the disposal of a student of English prosody (had such a man existed), though it is not to be supposed that even one such student did exist, *cir.* 1150-1200; which at least must or may have insensibly worked upon almost every practitioner of English verse at the time. He had the débris of Anglo-Saxon prosody, presenting a scheme which, whether at one time the "stuffings," the unaccented makeweights of its sections, were subject to any system of equivalence or not, had undoubtedly, in the majority of its examples, ceased to regard the constitution of these makeweights with any prudish or precisian scrupulosity. The principles of this prosody were, in the first place, the selection of certain strong syllables as pivots or pillars; and, in the second, the requirement that these pivots or pillars should put on an outward garment of phonetic similarity, either by vowel incipience generally, or by the incipience of certain consonants in particular. There was, for a third requirement, the necessity of a sharp pause in the middle of the verse (or, as may be preferred, between the constituents of each pair of verses), and there may have been internal pauses within the division thus made. The verse or couplet thus effected did not necessarily or even commonly submit itself to any system of rhythm recognisable in the other prosodies, but in a certain number—perhaps a very large number—of cases there was an approximation to the trochaic movement; that is to say, to the rhythm which has an initial arsis, length, stress, accent, or what not, descends from this to a thesis, shortness, slur, etc., and ascends again at the beginning of a new "foot" with the same alternation.

Further, he might, at least, notice that the practice of poetry in these measures had sensibly died down, and that it had to a great extent passed into the composition of rhythmical prose, on the same principles slightly relaxed.

On the other hand he had, in the quantitative Latin of his reading, a system which, while it agreed with Anglo-Saxon to some extent in the admission of equivalence, differed from it in every other conceivable manner and

feature, and provided a definite metrical rhythm. He had, in the accentual Latin of his reading and hearing, one which, less complaisant as to equivalence, adjusted itself much more easily and satisfactorily to his own language and habits of speech. In French and in Provençal (if, as he easily might from political connections, he knew any) he had a prosody corresponding to this last, but even more rigidly syllabic—syllabic, indeed, first of all, but relieving itself by a very free indulgence in elaborate stanzas of different lengths of line. He found something like these staves or stanzas in Scandinavian and Celtic, if he happened to know anything about them. And in *all* the living poetries, even in the later remains of moribund Anglo-Saxon, much more in accentual Latin, French, Provençal, Scandinavian, and Celtic, he found—Rhyme.

Such were the gifts, the examples, the patterns with which "the Mothers" provided him. The whole gist and bent of this work is to set forth exactly what he and his descendants have done with them.

CHAPTER II

FROM 1100 (?) TO 1210 (?)

Difficulty as to dates and documents—Working solution and selection—The Canute song—The fragments of St. Godric—The *Paternoster*—The *Moral Ode*—The *Orison of Our Lady*—Layamon—The *Ormulum*—The lesson of their examination—The "foot" or "measure unit"—Its internal and external arrangement—Resemblances and differences of the result as compared with the mother-prosodies—The importance and influence of rhyme—Illustrated from the *Rhyming Poem* and Layamon—From the *Ormulum* and the other pieces—From the *Paternoster*, *Orison*, and *Poema Morale*—And generally.

Difficulty as to dates and documents.

THE theory of English Prosody depends, from the combined point of view, historical and critical, to a very large extent on the inferences to be drawn from the practice of the age which intervenes between the Conquest and the great outburst of Romance about the beginning of the fourteenth century. It depends, most of all, on certain documents between 1100 and 1250. In order to arrive at the truth we ought, in the first place, to take these documents without any preconceived idea of what we are going to find in them; and in the second, we ought to have, what I have endeavoured to supply in the Introduction, a clear and impartial idea of what other documents and models these poets might possess. But there is what may be called an ante-initial difficulty of a further kind, which is of the most formidable size and weight; and this is that the exact dates of these crucial documents—a point upon which, as must be obvious, almost everything turns—are in all cases impossible to ascertain with absolute certainty, and in a majority of cases impossible to ascertain at all without relying on what is mainly guess-work.

Working solution and selection.

It is particularly desirable, in any enquiry, to avoid raising side-quarrels where it can be helped; and the present enquirer is especially anxious not to disturb the very hot ashes of the Linguistic *v.* Literary debate, if he can possibly avoid it. Nor is there, with rare exceptions, any absolute need for such disturbance, though on those occasions *signa canant* is, of course, the only motto. But on *this* occasion the trumpets can be silent. In respect of these earliest documents literary criticism proper has little, if anything, to say; and though there are in the linguistically-based judgments some startling differences, they need not be absolutely fatal. I suppose that even the persons who pride themselves on the exactest so-called, or so-itself-calling "scholarship" in Middle English, will make no absolute quarrel with the selection of the following, as probably or possibly dating between the Conquest and the second quarter, perhaps the second decade, of the thirteenth century. The list is as uncontentiously drawn up as possible; and while the order of it is not intended to make any illegitimate assumption, information as to dates and editions in each case is given in the notes, so that every reader may reconstruct that order by authority, if he pleases, or by actual examination, if that more excellent way commend itself to him. The pieces are five in number:[1]—

[1] I purposely exclude from detailed consideration the famous *Grave Poem*, as definitely Anglo-Saxon, though late, and exhibiting in its rhythm *currents* towards metre; as well as the so-called "Prophecy of Here," and the curse attributed to Archbishop Aldred, because the first makes noway and was not, perhaps, intended for verse at all, while the second is a mere jingle. But as it is important to put all documents before the reader, a part of the former and the whole of the two latter shall be given in this note.

Grave Poem (Guest, ed. Skeat, 368 *sq.*):—

The wes bold gebyld: er thu iboren were,
The wes molde imynt: er thu of moder come,
Ac hit nes no idiht: ne theo deopnes imeten,
Nes gyt iloced: hu long hit the were, etc. etc.

Prophecy of Here (Hever (?), before 1189 (??). For this see H. Morley, *English Writers*, iii. 200-201. I do not enter into this question at all):—

Whan thu ses in Here hert yreret,
Then sulen Engles in three be y-delet:
That an sal into Yrland al to late waie,
That other into Puille mid prude bileue,
The thride in hire athen [awen ?] hert alle wreke y-dreghe.

I. The Canute Song.
II. The fragments of St. Godric.
III. The rhymed *Paternoster*, with some other (chiefly religious) pieces printed by Morris.
IV. Layamon.
V. The *Ormulum.*

Let us examine each of these directly before attempting to draw any general conclusions.

The Canute Song.

How old the universally known lines about Canute and the Monks of Ely may be is a point that does not concern us. We know that the form in which they have been handed down,[1] which does concern us, is not much later than 1167. It runs thus :—

Merie sungen the muneches binnen Ely
Tha Cnut ching rew therby.
Roweth cnihtes neer the land
And here we thes muneches sang.

Now it is difficult to believe that anybody who will honestly submit himself to facts, and discard prepossession, can compare this with any specimens of pure Anglo-Saxon prosody, even with the *Grave Poem*, which is probably as late as, or later than, this piece itself, and not observe some striking variations. In the first place, alliteration is singularly weakened. "Merie" and "muneches," "Cnut" and "King," do the whole duty. In the second, though accent plays a much greater part, the ear of any delicacy will observe at once that it goes to constitute *not* the line, much less the double line, but the *foot* —an internal subdivision not noticeable[2] in Anglo-Saxon, or very rarely so noticeable, but always uppermost in Latin and French. These foot-divisions are, as on all reasonable calculation must be expected, rudimentary and half-formed.

Denunciation of Aldred on the Baron Urse :—

Hattest thu Urse
Have thu Godes kurs.

Aldred died in 1069, and William of Malmesbury, who records the curse (it was a somewhat unchristian death-bed one, on a Baron who had built his castle too near a monastery), wrote in 1125.

[1] By Thomas the Monk of Ely (fl. 1175).

[2] That is, not noticeable *in the same sense*, v. sup.

Something like the later English vacillation between iambic and trochaic rhythm (or rather substitution of the one for the other) is already apparent. In the third place, something like rhyme, or that half-rhyme which is known as assonance, is distinctly perceptible.

The fragments of St. Godric.

Now to St. Godric, whose fragments are a good deal later in date of record,[1] but who probably wrote or spoke them in no very different form from that in which they appeared after his death in 1170. They are these:—

(1)

Crist and Sainte Marie swa on scamel me iledde .
That ic on this erde ne silde with min bare fote itredie.

. . . . . .

(2)

Sainte Marie Virgine
Moder Jesu Cristes Nazarene
Onfo[ang], schild help thin Godric
Onfang, bring hegilich with the in Godes riche.

Sainte Marie, Cristes bur,
Maidenes clenhad, moderes flur
Dilie min sinne, rix in min mod
Bring me to winne with the selfd God.

. . . . . .

(3)

Sainte Nicholaes, Godes druth,
Tymbre us faire scone hus.
At thi burth [?], at thi bare,
Sainte Nicholaes, bring us wel thare.[2]

In plain words, and to put shortly the more important side of the matter, in all these four pieces there appears

[1] I made these remarks first on an exact transcript, which I owed to the kindness of Dr. J. Lawrence, from MS. Reg. v. F. vii. (B.M.). But the more I studied this, and, after it, the original MS., the more convinced I was of the importance of the document, which is at latest of the thirteenth century, and which has the music most fortunately preserved. My publishers were, accordingly, good enough to obtain the consent of the Museum authorities for photographing it, that it might form the frontispiece to this volume. The *tune* is difficult, I am told by experts, to be certain of, but the notes give an indication of syllabic value which cannot be overestimated. "Maidenes" and "moderes" each has full trisyllabic status; and no matter what the tune was, the prosodic foot-scheme is clear from these notes.

[2] There are slight differences of interpretation, and *very* slight ones of reading. But the former do not concern us at all, and the latter do not affect the scansion.

that "foot-division" and composition, which it is practically impossible to apply with any consecutive metrical result to Anglo-Saxon verse. You can make "feet" of this latter, no doubt—Guest's "sections" are often little else. It is the great evidence of rockfast genuineness in the "foot" that you can apply it everywhere, in metre and in rhythm, in verse and in prose. But you cannot everywhere make satisfactory and corresponding *aggregation* of feet. Here you can. It is no valid argument against the division which follows that it is not the sole possible. As has been shown above, it is possible to adopt startlingly different foot-division for a very great deal of English poetry. But change this as you like, the *general* effect will remain :—

Merie | sungen | the muneches | binnen | Ely
Tha Cnut | ching | rew | therby.
Roweth | cnihtes | neer the | land
And here | we thes | muneches | sang.[1]

Here we have (1) the inherited licence (which will always remain, but be regulated) of inserting "unaccented" but not "extrametrical" syllables; (2) that which will always remain unchanged, of composing a foot out of a single syllable with strong stress, stop, or catch of breath; (3) the substitution of trochee for iamb, and *vice versa*, with the possibility of anapæst—all these things being subject, though as yet "confusedly," to the general scheme of the metre, which, as given above, oscillates between that of

Pone luctum Magdalena,

and that of

Vexilla regis prodeunt.

So the first of the Godric fragments—

[1] Or, if anybody prefers it,

And he | re we | thes mune | ches sang,

which is, perhaps, better. And line two may be either four-foot, with monosyllabic equivalence, or three-foot without; while it is possible to start on an anapæstic basis — "Merie sun | gen the mune | ches bin | nen Ely." See Appendix on "Feet" and note at p. 299.

Crist and | Sainte | Marie
Swa on sca|mel me | iledde
That ic | on this | erde | ne silde
With min |[?] ba|[?]re fote | itredie,

And the second—

Sainte | Mari|e Vir|gine
Moder Je|su Crist|es Naza|rene
Onfang | schild | help thin | Godric,
Onfo | bring he|gelich | mit the | in Go|des ric,

where, if it be preferred (and more probably), the last line is double, the metre shortening from four feet to three feet.

Sainte | Mari|e Cris|tes bur
Maidenes | Clenhad | moderes | flur
Dilie | min sinne | rix in | min mod
Bring me | to winne | with the | selfd God.

And the third—

Sainte | Nicholas, | Godes | druth,
Tymbre us | faire | scone | hus,
At thi | burth, | at thi | bare,
Sainte | Nicholas, | bring us | wel thare.

In all these, muffled echoes-before of the three great ballad rhyme-"measures"—"common," "short," and "long"—are audible, if only underground.

The only additional remark required is a sufficiently important one—that the foot-divisions in the Godric, as compared with those in the Canute, pieces show a greater tendency to contract or extend themselves in point of syllabic composition, while remaining equally unmistakable in integral substance—in other words to *equivalence* and *substitution*; and, secondly, that in Godric (1) we seem to have an example of alternate rhyme. Both these are important, but the first the more so. It is perhaps also capable of being contended that the trochee gives way somewhat to the iamb.

Let us now pass to the third document, or rather group of documents.

Here the dates are even more puzzling, and the pieces themselves, though not extremely voluminous, are too large to be given *in extenso*. For the purpose, however, selections will suffice amply. The most remarkable and important of all is the well-known rhymed *Paternoster*, which Dr. Morris printed in the first volume of his *Old English Homilies*,[1] and which, though there is considerable variation in the estimate of its date, can hardly be younger than the twelfth century. It begins thus :— The *Paternoster*.

Vre feder thet[2] in heouene is,
That is al soth ful iwis.
Weo moten to theos weordes iseon
Thet to liue and to saule gode beon.
Thet weo beon swa his sunes iborene
Thet he beo feder and we him icorene
Thet we don alle his ibeden
And his wille for to reden.

On this the observations which present themselves most readily and obviously are: first, that the iambic cadence,[3] though by no means universal, is rather more dominant than the trochaic; secondly, that one or the other is almost more prominent than ever; thirdly, that while, for obvious convenience of committing to memory, the lines run to shortness, substitution of trisyllabic[4] for dissyllabic feet is unmistakable; fourthly, that rhyme is more definitely and strongly marked than in either of the previous examples or groups, and mere assonance less, so that (to extend the examination) in the first twenty lines there are only two instances of imperfect *consonance—on* and *om*, *enne* and *unne*.

[1] E.E.T.S. 1868, i. 55 *sq*. As will be seen, it is the Lord's Prayer "extra-illustrated."

[2] It does not (as should perhaps have been observed before) seem necessary, for the purpose of this book, to keep the "thorn-letter," etc.

[3] Which sets itself at once to the ear in hardly altered modern English,

Our Fa|ther that | in hea|ven is

(without prejudice on the *crux* of "heaven").

[4] Never, I think, more than *tri*syllabic, except perhaps at the ends of lines (place of licence in every prosody!). And even there, as in the *icorene-iborene* instance, there is a great possibility of elision-contraction, if not even of that stumbling into the *deca*syllable, every actual or possible instance of which is to be carefully noted.

The *Moral Ode*.

Turning from this to the famous *Moral Ode*, or *Poema Morale*, we come to an example of the very highest interest, because of the existence of several texts, all of the general period that we are now handling, but arranged by philological authorities in different stages of antiquity. We may give the first four lines in three forms, the first of which, from the Lambeth MS., Dr. Morris regarded as the oldest and well before 1200, the second from the Trinity MS. taken as still before that date but younger, and the third from a Jesus (Cambridge) MS. held to be of the middle of the thirteenth century.

(1)

Ich em | nu al|der thene | ich wes | a win|tre and | a lare,
Ich wel|de ma|re then|e ich ded|e mi wit | ahte | bon mare,
Wel long|e ich hab|be child | ibon | a word|e and | a dede,
Thah | ich bo | a win|tre ald | to jung | ich em | on rede.

(2)

Ich am nu elder than ich was a wintre and a lore,
Ich wealde more than idude mi wit oh to be more,
To longe ich habbe child iben a worde and a dade,
Theih ibie a winter eald to jung ich am on rade.

(3)

Ich am eldre than ich wes a winter and ek on lore,
Ich welde more than ich dude, my wyt auhte beo more,
Wel longe ich habbe child ibeo, a werke and eke on dede,
Thah ich beo of wynter old, to yong ich am on rede.

In these three, or rather in the single poem, which they vary so slightly yet so significantly, we see a measure having more resemblance in general character to the first Godric fragment than to any other previously given. Although there is a middle section quite strong enough to enable it to be arranged, with the two others, in couplets instead of single lines, yet one feels, in reading, that such an arrangement would not be so natural as that of the single long line with section or pause. But the rhythmical character approaches that of metre or foot-division more decisively than in the Godric case: while it is of the first importance that, the two earlier versions differing very slightly, the third improves on both in metrical adjustment. The modern

voice finds itself to be more at home, and is "brought up" with only slight jolts now and then[1] instead of trying in vain to adjust any lilt at all, as in the case of most A.S. or O.E. rhythms. Though there are relics and wrecks of alliteration, they are only wrecks and relics; and the rhyme is, for a piece of such almost certain antiquity, observed with singular strictness, the liberties taken with it being very few and very slight.[2]

The *Orison of Our Lady.*

Let us turn from this to another well-known piece of which we seem to have no copy certainly older than 1200, but which cannot be much later than that date, and is probably much earlier—the *Orison of Our Lady.*

Cristes | milde | moder | seynte | marie,
Mines | liues | leome | mi leou|e lefdi,
To the ich buwe and mine kneon ich beie,
And al min heorte blod to the ich offrie,
Thu ert mire soule liht, and mine heorte blisse,
Mi lif and mi tohope min heale mid iwisse,
Ich ouh wurthie the mid alle mine mihte,
And singge the lofsong bi daie and bi nihte,
Vor thu me hauest iholpen aueole kunne wise,
And ibrouht [me] of helle into paradise.

. . . . . .

Heo beoth so read so rose so hwit so the lilie,
And euer more heo beoth gled and singeth thuruhut murie,
Mid brihte gimstones hore krune is al biset,
And al heo doth thet ham liketh, so thet no thing ham ne let,
Thi leoue sune is hore king and thu ert hore kwene,
Ne beoth heo neuer i-dreaued mid winde ne mid reine.

Morris, *Old English Homilies*, i. 191-199, complete; part in Morris and Skeat, i. 129.

This is evidently a member of the same class as the *Ode*, but with more variety of swing and range. Rhyme has not yet broken up the long verse into two short ones, but is observed with equally intentional accomplishment. There are, moreover, two things noticeable in this piece.

[1] The insertion of "eke" in the first and third lines of version 3 is simply priceless; it shows the increasing *acclimatisation* of the English ear to the new rhythm, and its increasing demand for truth to it.

[2] In 396 lines or 198 couplets of version 1 there are but few imperfect consonances (*hade, rede; walde, holde; welden, ihalden; gilden, scalden; thonke, manke*, etc.: added *n*'s—*mage, agen; libben, sibbe; senden, ende*, etc.; juxtapositions of *h* and *ch* syllables, *brochte, bohte*, etc.). And these slight liberties do not affect 10 per cent of the whole.

The first is that not merely the trochaic but the iambic metrical arrangement settles in places towards, if not actually into, the regular "heroic" or decasyllabic line which had long been a standard in French. The second is that the bars of the long lines more than once make the same approach to the familiar and delightful ballad stanza. It is taking hardly the slightest liberty to modernise some of those given above, as—

She beës [1] as red as rose,
  As white as the lilỳ,
And ever more she beës glad,
  And sings throughout merrỳ.
. . . .
Thy loving son he is their king,
  And thou, thou art their queen,
Nor are they never avexèd
  With wind(e) nor with rain.

If the shade of Dr. Guest (or the living body of let be who it may) will show me a decent handful of double couplets in A.S. which provide anything like this rhythm, I will bury this book as deep as Prospero's.

Layamon.

To Layamon, who gives us the most important document of the whole period, we shall have to return again and again; but the *Brut* may properly receive preliminary treatment here on the same basis as the others. The problem in it is, and obviously must be, a more complicated one than that of the short and quasi-lyrical pieces hitherto dealt with. In the first place the poet has a story to tell, and in the second place it is a very long story; but no more of this for the present. Taking any page of the book at random, say ii. 51,[2] let us give the two versions supposed of *c.* 1200 and *c.* 1250.

A	B
Eorles ther comen riche & wel idone & alle tha wise the wuneden on Bruttene.	[wanting]
tha the king heom havede isæid	tho the king hadde iseid
& bæd heom ræden him ræd.	he bad yam reade him read.

[1] Orig. = "they be" *in loc.* : but this modernises rather less well.
[2] Ed. Madden, 3 vols., London, 1847.

whaem he mihte bitæche	wan he mihte bi-take
al his kine-riche.	al his kineriche.
For nefde he nenne sune	for he nadde bote one dohter
the his land mihte halden.	[wanting]
ne child bute ane dohter	
the him wes swithe deore.	that he lofuede deore.
& hire he wolde bitachē	and hire he wolde bi-take
al his kine-riche,	al his kineriche.
& yefuen hire lauerd	and yefue hire louerd
thene hæhste mon of his ærd.	than beste of this erth.
Summe him ræden anan	Somme him radde on
that he heo geven than eorle Conan.	that he hire gefue eorl Conan.
he wes wis and riche	[wanting]
him heo he mihte bitæche.	

The first thing noticed, of course, will be that the rhythm is much less well marked, much less uniform, and much less modern than that of the earlier examples. In other words, it is much closer, very much closer, to the A.S. form—so much so that it has been possible for some, without actual absurdity, to take it for such rhythm "a little scratched," but "serving," while others, going yet farther, have affected even to minimise the scratchings. But this will nowise do. In the first place, there is the perpetual, the haunting, the unblinkable obsession and protrusion of rhyme. Of the twenty lines just quoted (and many much more favourable examples might have been pitched upon) twelve rhyme almost completely, others have more or less attempt at assonance, while only two couplets neglect rhyme and assonance altogether. Further, alliteration lessens its appearances, and the lines or half-lines (whichever it be preferred to call them) are for the most part roughly parallelised in length and rhythm, and essay this later characteristic in a fashion almost as constant as it is admittedly rudimentary. That every now and then we come across a line or couplet in which all these characteristics are absent, and the old alliteration, inequality of halves, and absence of rhythm except a mere rough trochaic, are present; that, for instance, on another dipping at ii. 190 we find

That heo tha haethene hatien scolden,

need give no pause to us. On the contrary, we should be extremely surprised if such things did not appear; and they are fully balanced, and their lesson completely brought out, by such other things as the well-known

> Tha answerede Vortiger
> Of elchen vuel he wes war,

which are iambic couplets as complete as any Frenchman of the time could have turned out.[1]

The *Ormulum*.

And, lastly, we must give a citation from the other great document of the time—great in point of size and of curiosity, if not exactly in point of literary merit—the *Ormulum*.[2] Here there is no need to pick or choose on the one hand, or to sample at random, for fairness' sake, on the other—the whole being rigidly uniform. The opening passage in Morris and Skeat will do perfectly well :—

> And nu icc wile shæwenn yuw
> summ-del withth Godess hellpe
> Off thatt Judisskenn follkess lac
> thatt Drihhtin wass full cweme,
> And mikell hellpe to the follc,
> to læredd and to læwedd,
> Biforenn thatt te Laferrd Crist
> was borenn her to manne.

---

[1] The above fragmentary *Sors Layamoniana*, accepted with rigid probity, is quite sufficient for the purpose, though selection would give fifty better places. It may, however, be desirable to assure the suspicious that the remarks in the text, here and elsewhere, are not based on any "dipping," haphazard or deliberate, but on a reading of the entire *Brut* (and of large parts of it over and over again), as thorough as could be given by the Middle English scholar, whoever he be, who has kept himself most unspotted from the world of modern English literature. On this reading I could base, if I chose, an analysis as meticulous and as voluminous as that of the most dogged German "enumerator." But I have no desire to thrust the processes of my workshop before the reader. The more thoroughly and unweariedly those processes are carried on, the more strongly do they establish the facts that the imposition of the mould of rhymed metre is evident throughout the first version, and still more evident in the second. Another fact is that the form of the mould seems to vary between *eight*- and *six*-syllabled lines; according as the poet had, in his uncertain and diverse mind, the longer or shorter forms of the A.S. distich-line, or perhaps as he was influenced by some knowledge of the French Alexandrine and its child, the six-syllable couplet of Philippe de Thaun and others.

[2] Ed. Holt, 2 vols., Oxford, 1878.

Acc nu ne geyynethth itt hemm nohht
to winnenn eche blisse
Thohh thatt teyy standenn dayy and nihht
to theowwtenn Godd and lakenn ;
Forr all itt iss onnyæness Godd
thohh thatt teyy swa ne wenenn,
Forrthi thatt teyy ne kepenn nohht
noff Crist, noff Cristess moderr.
And tohh-swa-thehh nu wile icc yuw
off theyyre lakess awwnenn,
Hu mikell god teyy tacnenn uss
off ure sawle nede ;
Forr all thatt lac wass sett thurrh Godd,
forr thatt itt shollde tacnenn
Hu Cristess theoww birrth lakenn Crist
gastlike i gode thæwess,
Withth all thatt tatt bitacnedd wass
thurrh alle theyyre lakess.

Orm's at first sight portentous spelling (which is explained by himself, and after him in all adequate accounts of English literature) does not concern us more than in so far as it helps to ascertain a very useful thing —the length or shortness of a very large proportion of English vowel-sounds at this time. It even establishes the very important prosodic fact (ignorance of which has proved a constant stumbling-block later, especially in the disputes about English hexameters and the like) that doubling the consonant after an English vowel need not, though it *may*, make that vowel long in value.[1] Another point which may be just worth noting in relation to Orm is that, as anybody who cares to look at the poem will see, a vast majority of the fifteenth syllables are made up by the final *e*, which is indeed the case with the final syllable of all Early Middle English verse. On the one hand this fact explains the triumph of the fourteener after the dropping of the *e*. On the other it throws light on the well-known and, to some people, puzzling or even offensive addition, in doggerel English ballad verse of later times, of

[1] This is a good place to guard against a confusion (so common that it supplies perhaps the only considerable argument against the use of the word) between *sound*-"length" and *quantity*-"length." As will be shown more fully later, the first usually produces the second, but the second does not necessarily imply the first.

a sort of "gasp-syllable," as in *The Well of St. Keyne*.[1] That the *e* is also the parent of the forms "paly," "hugy," and so on, which also have irritated the ignorant, and which certainly at times have been "affectations," may be added.

Here, for once, it is all plain sailing—or at least one would think it so, if it were not that the incalculableness of mankind is nowhere shown more clearly than on this question of prosody. We have at last an *undoubtedly* metrical arrangement, in long lines of fifteen syllables, or shorter ones of eight and seven alternately, couched in a monotonous iambic cadence, *not* attempting rhyme, but submitting itself in the most unhesitating and undeviating manner to the strictest requirements of metre; rejecting all substitution of two syllables for one; and in regard to individual syllables, though attending to quantity and (not with absolute strictness) to accent, yet, wherever it can, putting short or unstressed syllables in the places where the iambic requires them, and long or stressed ones in the others. As to Layamon, we shall have to return to the *Ormulum*, for there are some very interesting questions, such as whether its metre can be regarded as the same as, or as closely connected with, that of the *Moral Ode*;[2] but to dwell on these *now* would be improper. Walter's brother has finished all that we require in this place, the general, *prima facie*, "jump-to-the-eyes" prosodic character of an English poem at the junction of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. And taking these together with the characteristics furnished by the others, we may surely feel ourselves justified in "collecting" certain fairly inferential, if not actually demonstrable, results, even before we arrive at the Interchapter on this period.

[1] Not as written by Southey, but as usually sung and printed for singing:

A well there is in the West Countrỳ,
And a fairer never was seen-a!
There is not a wife in the West Countrỳ
But has heard of the Well of St. Keyne-a!

[2] Syllabically there is no doubt of the connection perhaps; in matter of cadence there is, I think, more.

For the facts and documents thus, I believe, fairly, and in their necessary proportions fully, exposed, do make it possible to base on them an impartial examination of the state of English prosody as it actually reveals itself between, in round numbers, 1100 and 1200. Not one single known or reasonably attributed piece of the time but has been given in whole or in part; and the phenomena which have been elicited from them are those which do naturally and simply emerge. What are they?

The lesson of their examination.

The first, the greatest, the most pervading, as one would think beyond all possible, as one may surely say beyond all reasonable, doubt or question is *rhythm* of a kind roughly similar to that of English poetry as it has been known ever since; and not roughly, but sharply, unmistakably, almost totally, dissimilar to that of Anglo-Saxon poetry. We may make this out polemically later: let us make it out constructively and directly here.[1]

The "foot" or "measure unit."

And let us in the first place ask, Can we get any common measures of prosodic valuation, lower than the line, but constituting the rhythmical-metrical quality of line, couplet, and rudimentary stanza, out of the matter before us? The answer, as it happens, can be given in the very words, without even disallowing a haggle or proviso which they contain, of the most learned opponent that the system of pure historical prosody has ever had, and one of the most obstinate, ingenious, and resourceful that it can ever hope or fear to have—the words of Guest himself. "It is not" (*E. R.* p. 161) "till a period comparatively modern that the common and triple measures disentangle themselves from the heap, and form as it were the two limits of English rhythm." Now this period has been reached in the examples recorded just previously;

[1] Before doing so it is perhaps necessary, and may certainly be desirable, to put on one side a question which has often been discussed, which is perhaps quite worth discussion in its proper place, but which does not fall to be considered according to the plan of this book. And this is the influence of music in the affair. Very likely this influence was great, perhaps it was almost supreme; but it does not for our purpose matter. It is again, like the origin of metrical value already referred to, a "previous question." But we may perhaps make it a subsequent one, and deal with it later.

and it had not been reached in the period of Anglo-Saxon poetry. We may find them here and there in "the heap" of that time, but they are accidental, they are very probably delusive, and even if not, they can never be arranged on any continuing method or system. Whether those who assert that Anglo-Saxon verse was, though doubtless, as Guest says, "sung to the harp," sung to a sort of recitative with stress-syllables only, are right, does not matter; that is another of our "previous questions," though it may be an actual one with other people. *Securi judicamus* that in every example quoted above, except those survivals in Layamon (of which we would not get rid for anything, though it may be suspected that the other party would be only too glad to get rid of the rest), the "common and triple measures" *have* emerged,[1] *have* "disentangled themselves from the heap." To refuse to call the results of the emergence dissyllabic and trisyllabic feet appears to me almost pure unreason, but *we* could call them *x* and *y* without hurting our case.

Its internal and external arrangement.

We have, then, our dissyllabic and trisyllabic "feet," and the next question is, On what principle are they arranged? The answer to this must be twofold — dealing on the one hand with internal, on the other with external arrangement. Internally, the arrangement of the dissyllabic foot ("common-time unit") is, as a rule, either short-long or long-short, more rarely long-long, hardly ever short-short. The internal arrangement of the triple-time unit or foot, which is much less commonly found, is usually short-short-long, less commonly long-short-short, very rarely at this time short-short-short, and practically never two longs and a short arranged in any way.

The external or combined arrangements vary extremely in appearance and in correspondence, doubtless with the varying length of the versicles which they replace. But they may safely be said to hover round, for preference, an

[1] The triple is no doubt less common than the common, and emerges most distinctly in the latest examples, such as the Jesus version of the *Moral Ode*. But it is *there* in the *Orison of Our Lady*, and even in the Godric fragments.

arrangement, single or reduplicated, of four feet which are most commonly all of the common-time dissyllabic type. And we also notice that again—whether as a result of conscious or unconscious following of the unmetrical versicle and its variations or not—a curious system of equivalence, in a clumsy, tentative, unmethodical manner, is making its way. Not merely are the various types of the common or dissyllabic, of the triple or trisyllabic unit interchanged, but within limits, especially at the beginning, middle, and end of a verse, a monosyllable will do for a dissyllable.

Resemblances and differences of the result as compared with the mother-prosodies.

The result of these various arrangements is already, though in a most rudimentary condition, a prosodic system which, though it partakes of the Anglo-Saxon, the double Latin, and the French systems in all cases more or less, and may owe something to Scandinavian or Celtic less directly, is so different from any of the three first individually, that it is equally absurd to endeavour to subject it to supposed "native" laws, or to stigmatise it as "the rhythm of the foreigner."

It resembles Anglo-Saxon in a certain liberty of syllabic measurement and in a strong prominence of accent, but differs from it entirely in rhythm, has dropped most of its alliteration for the purposes for which alliteration was formerly used, and has definitely assumed rhyme as a practically indispensable, or largely predominating, attendant and ornament.

It resembles Classical Latin in allowing substitution of trisyllabic for dissyllabic feet, but is quite unlike it in general rhythmical arrangement, in particulars of foot-composition, and in rhyme; while it resembles Low Latin in rhyme, and to some extent in rhythm, but differs from it in a much greater licence of syllabic variation.

In this last respect it differs still more from French, as well as in its concomitant variety of foot-distribution, but it resembles French in at least some of its simpler forms of verse-, as distinguished from foot-scheme, and in rhyme.

The importance and influence of rhyme.

Collecting in a wider sweep, we shall find two things present in all but one of our examples (one of them being present in that also), which distinguish the whole group

from Anglo-Saxon verse. These two are rhyme, and the presence of a definite metrical rhythm, as yet rough, rudimentary, and faltering, but quite unmistakable to any one with an ear, and a thorough trained familiarity with English pronunciation.[1] The connection between these two—whether it exists and what it is—is a point not merely of the greatest interest but of very great importance. There can be no question of bias in favour of rhyme on the part of Guest when he says that this is not, as is sometimes asserted, a mere ornament: "it marks and defines the accent, and thereby strengthens and supports the rhythm. Its advantages have been felt so strongly that no people have ever adopted an accentual rhythm without also adopting rhyme." But perhaps it may be doubted whether this statement, though quite guilelessly [2] on the part of its author, does not put the cart before the horse, to say no more. If accentual rhythm, as Guest himself held, denotes something which governs the study of O.E., M.E., and Modern English at once, how is it that almost the entire poetical period of the first—half a millennium or so—passed with hardly the slightest signs of rhyme appearing? How is it, further, that in the famous *Rhyming Poem*, with an abundance and superfluity of rhyme itself, the rhythm is perfectly different from that which dominates all our examples? How is it, lastly, that English, while retaining this rhythm, has—not indeed in all its forms, but in one of the very chief of them, in "blank verse"—been able to *discard* rhyme?

The circumstances pointed at in these queries, the unbiassed examination of the documents of the period before us, and the whole course of the present enquiry, will be found, as it seems to the present writer, to support a theory somewhat different from Guest's, even in first appearance (though it agrees cordially with his in acknowledging the importance and time-marking effect of rhyme), and leading up to another theory of the whole of

[1] I do not mean "phonetics."

[2] Unless he meant (as he may have, from what follows) to include "head-rhyme," *i.e.* "alliteration," in which case the statement is not quite devoid of guile.

Middle and Modern English versification, which is directly opposed to his. The theory may be thus stated :—Rhyme, when accepted by any language, gradually but necessarily *breaks up* prosody by versicles or sections merely, and substitutes prosody by *feet*—that is to say, by minor internal divisions, which are batched and brought to metrical correspondence by the rhyme itself.

If this is true, we shall find an explanation of what is unexplained and inexplicable on the theory of continuous and indifferent accentual versification in O.E., M.E., and Modern English—the appearance in the two latter of a rhythm which inevitably suggests, if it does not imperatively require, such a foot-division. That rhyme might have been strong enough to effect this, even without the assistance of the rhythms of Latin and French and of music, is a proposition which those who accept that just stated may receive favourably, but which they are not in the least bound to accept at any peril to the general theory. And that anything, except that theory, can survive an impartial comparison of the *Rhyming Poem* and Layamon, the present writer is convinced, experimentally and definitely, to be impossible.

Illustrated from the *Rhyming Poem* and Layamon.

The former[1]—taking, to give Guest the fullest advantage, his own divisions for guide—gives us, in most of the lines, hardly any rhythm (as that word is familiar to us) at all. By dwelling strongly on the rhymed syllables, and hurrying or drawling on the rest in the "patter" manner, it may be possible to get a dim and far-off music, while some lines, no doubt, lend themselves occasionally and incidentally to something of the same kind, as do others in everything back to Caedmon himself. But it is still, in *general* system and effect, merely *versicular*, merely recitative, with rhymes painfully added, and giving no

[1] Glæd | wæs ic gliw|um : gleng|ed hiw|um
Blissa bleo|um : blost | ma hiw|um
Secg | as mec seg|on : sym|bel ne | aleg|on
Feorh | -giefe gefeg|on : fræt | wed wæg|um
. . . . .
Scrif | en scrad | glad | : thurh | gescad | inbrad
Wæs | on lag | u-stream | e lad | : thær | me leoth une | biglad.

These are Guest's divisions, not mine. I should make none but at the :.

more rhythmical accompaniment than the stump or clatter of a clog does.

Turn to Layamon, as above quoted, and you find the further process illustrated in a fashion almost incredibly clear and satisfactory—all the more so that the good priest appears to have been a person by no means made very poetical by the gods. In one set of places you have the versicular, the recitative arrangement unaltered. In others you find the imperfect and rudimentary construction of the rhyme showing itself in almost all conceivable stages and forms, from the mere lame halting jingle of the *Rhyming Poem* itself to something approaching a regular step. And then you find, not any great variety of rhythm indeed, but the complete iambic dimeter, the complete "four-accent" line (to give the hostile nomenclatures no advantage over each other for the moment), finally reached, though the poet, willy-nilly, falls away from it, again struggles back to it, reaches it, and *da capo.*

From the *Ormulum* and the other pieces.

The lesson of all the other documents agrees exactly, with the exception of one; and that exception *probat regulam*—confirms the rule by putting it to the test—after the best manner of its kind. The *Ormulum* shows us the rhythm without the rhyme; and it is observable (exactly as we should expect) that, in the absence of rhyme, the poet is only able to achieve a peculiarly monotonous and unmusical rhythm, and can only keep that up by observing (whether on French or Latin or even Northern [1] models does not in the least matter) an inviolable uniformity of syllabic arrangement. In the others the illustration continues directly, instead of confirming in its dissidence, the lesson derived from the contrast of Layamon and the *Rhyming Poem.* They are all more or less lyrical, and they were probably all either deliberately composed for popular use or accidentally preserved by popular selection. In this latter case (the case of probably the earliest, the Canute song, and, though in a less degree, of the Godric

[1] I have put this in merely "to oblige," though some lovers of the North will not be grateful. *I* do not think Northern (*i.e.* Scandinavian) models had anything to do with it.

fragments), what we may call the accompaniment of the rhythm is—as is natural in all folk-song, and as is seen to the present day in nursery rhymes, and in the half-inarticulate scraps of "sing-song" which children compose for themselves—much more noticeable than any exact correspondence of verbal arrangement, though that arrangement does exist. Two syllables for one or one for two, three feet or three and a half for four, these "break no squares" (as a younger but still old English phrase has it) between the rhythm and its practitioners. The type is fairly kept, but an extreme licence of coming short of it, or going beyond it, is instinctively assumed. We do not feel, as we do in Layamon, that the poet has any conscious theory of prosody more or less dimly before him—nay, that he has two such theories and is oscillating between them for want of skill—so much as that he lets his instinct guide him roughly, but not at random.

From the *Paternoster*, *Orison*, and *Poema Morale*.

In the more complete, substantive, and *literary* examples of the *Paternoster*, the *Orison*, and the *Moral Poem*—the two first beyond all question intended to be used by the vulgar, the last almost equally so—the lesson is more complicated, but it points all the same way. The rhyme, and the foot-divisions producing metrical rhythm, are better marked; the poems as wholes have acquired form; but there are still large variations, and it is very uncertain how far these variations are consciously and *schematically* intended by the poet, as they seem to me to be, not very much later, in *Genesis and Exodus*. The new-born delight in rhyme is, in its exercise, forcing and squeezing the versicles more and more into balanced foot-divisions; but the old reluctance to be tied down to a fixed number of syllables survives. We can hear, not so very far off, the echo beforehand of the instances when it will be possible for Coleridge, in two successive lines on the same norm, to write

> And the owls have awakened the crowing cock,

and to follow it with

> To—whit—to—whoo.

without impropriety or ill sound. Even now we can, as was shown above in reference to the *Orison*, occasionally discover something like a rudimentary selection (conscious or unconscious) of different values of this kind, so as to make, not a mere repetition but a symphonic scheme, not a succession of lines but a "varivalued" couplet, not a succession of identical couplets but a stanza.

And generally.

Still further examination—not much further in the one case—brings us to yet two other facts of the very highest importance. The first is that these varieties, these substitutions, are reducible to certain prosodic forms such as those above referred to, in which one long, strong, stressed, accented (or anything-else-you-please) syllable is generally present,[1] while in some cases there is no other, in many cases one other, in fewer two others, of the short, weak, unstressed, unaccented kind; that these are evidently regarded (subject to restrictions as yet impossible to define, but easy to perceive) as *equivalent* to each other; that one, so to speak, will pass current for another. Also, yet once more, and though we have by this time plunged up to knee and almost up to neck in burning questions, we now come to perhaps the most burning of all—whether we can discover any foot-division containing more than three syllables. Dr. Guest here would not have quarrelled about the fact, as his rule that each couple of accented syllables must be separated by one or more unaccented, but by not more than two, shows; but he would not, of course, have granted the foot-division. The facts, however, not merely grant this, but impose it, wriggle as hard as the accentual scanner may. And I am myself prepared to agree with Guest, and to disagree with such authorities as my friend and predecessor Professor Masson, in thinking that no English trisyllabic foot can have more than one long syllable in it, that English

[1] I doubt whether *at this time* it is possible to find a tribrach, whence, no doubt, Dr. Guest's explosion of ! at the suggestion of its occurring at any time. The prerogative of accent was too recent; but it was sure to be disregarded in time.

tetrasyllabic feet do not exist at all,[1] and that it is rather doubtful whether there are such English feet as amphibrachs. These points, however, we shall constantly take up, and illustrate as usual from the facts. For the present we shall regard as proved, to every impartial ear and eye, that rhyme, or music, or the imitation of French and Latin, or cross-breeding, or all together, had, by the inexorable and indisputable testimony of documents, substituted, between 1000 and 1200, for prosody by versicles with accent, but without appreciable metrical rhythm of the modern kind, a prosody by "feet," with rhyme, arranged on a distinct and interchangeable system, with a result of metrical rhythm not distinguishable, except in accomplishment, from that of Lord Tennyson or of Mr. Swinburne.

[1] In poetic rhythm, that is to say. In prose they certainly do. But on all this see Appendix on "Feet."

CHAPTER III

THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

The documents—Layamon B—The later *Moral Ode*—The *Bestiary*—*Sinners Beware*, etc.—The *Love-Rune*—*The Owl and the Nightingale*—Tendency to syllabic rigidity—The correctives of this—Versicular survival: *Proverbs of Alfred*—Modified in *Proverbs of Hendyng*—*Genesis and Exodus*—The Northern Psalter—Robert of Gloucester—The earliest Romances: *Havelok*—*King Horn*—The earliest English *fabliaux*.

The documents.

THE documents anterior to the thirteenth century, or (to take the slightly later date, which is not material to us, of 1210) to its second decade, are of the highest interest, but they should have been sufficiently examined. Those assigned to the thirteenth century itself are of interest hardly inferior, as well as much more numerous, and must be examined now. One group is dated by philologists before 1250; another before 1300. Let us follow this division without questioning[1] and see what it gives us.

Of the first group the most important documents are:—

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[1] It is an obvious objection, "If you do not feel competent to date them for yourself, what is your competence for the present examination?" But the answer is as obvious as the objection, and much more cogent. These dates have been arrived at by a process and on principles quite unliterary and purely philological. They may be—they probably are in some cases—incorrect; but at any rate they are untainted by even the slightest theory about the literary, or the prosodic, character of the documents themselves. Hence, as granted, they are, if not concessions to the adversary, at any rate things not vitiated by any preconceived theories on the part of the granter. From the purely literary and critical point of view there are, as a rule, no premises for coming to any but the widest conclusions about the *positive* dates; we shall see that examination from such a point of view finds no difficulty with the *relative* dates linguistically given, but, on the contrary, confirms them.

808.042
SAI

The later version of the *Brut.*
The later versions of the *Moral Ode.*
The *Bestiary.*
The *Proverbs of Alfred.*
The Owl and the Nightingale.

Some short pieces of very uncertain date *may* intervene between these and the second group, consisting of—

The *Proverbs of Hendyng.*
The *Chronicle* and *Saints' Lives* of Robert of Gloucester.
The Northumbrian *Psalter.*
The two probably oldest romances, that is to say—
Havelok.
King Horn.

Let us now examine what all these actually, and not on theory, give us.

Layamon B.

The later version of Layamon need not occupy us long, and a passage from it has been already given. It is one of those copies which are so frequent in the Middle Ages, and which, by multiplication without much improvement, have perhaps brought discredit on mediæval literature. It would seem to have been executed by rather a stupid copyist, who was quite destitute of the flashes of original talent which many of his fellows possessed; who often (as many, if not most of them, it must be confessed, did) spoilt his text; who does not seem to have had any distinct or direct idea of improving it; but who was driven, by the mere advance of the Time-Spirit, to make some things which, whether we are to call them improvements or not, are alterations, and alterations of a definite drift. He is, so to speak, always staggering towards more rhyme. Here are examples taken, as usual, with as little selection as possible. At ii. 251 (Madden) we find:—

A	B
That comen tha brothere beien to-some.	That comen the brothers beine to-gadere.

This may not look very promising, but a moment's consideration will show that the copyist, with "brethren" and "together" in his head, was blundering at a rhyme instead of acquiescing in the frankly unrhyming terminations of

the earlier couplet. Elsewhere the often noticed change (ii. 157) of "wel idon" into "great win," so as to rhyme with "Apolin," which had previously been left unpaired, is but one of many. In general rhythm the advance is slight, but what has been made is significant. Multiply and tighten your rhyme, and you must, as has been said, make plain your rhythm.

The later *Moral Ode*.

The lesson of the later versions of *The Moral Ode* (partly drawn already) is just the same, only more so. There is not much room for improvement in rhyme, even the earliest form being well advanced that way; but even here there are small touches. Forms are altered slightly to get the rhyme more exact, the final "n" being specially often dropped with this view. But the attention of the rehandler here was evidently directed rather to the rhythm itself, which he makes more swinging and smoother, after a fashion which may have been unconscious on his part, but of which no reader with an ear can pretend unconsciousness. The instance of this in the first two lines of the Jesus version was pointed out above, the "eke" being an "eke" in the Scotch sense—an addition to improve and strengthen the effect. Now he adds, now he takes away; not always, perhaps, achieving much, but nearly always, it would seem, aiming at something. And it is not a little noticeable that he sometimes, *e.g.* at l. 152, seems deliberately to drop alliteration.[1]

The *Bestiary*.

With the *Bestiary*[2] we come to fresher, more compli-

[1] Thus

Afre he wolde her in wo and in wane wunien

becomes

Eure he wolde in bonen beon and in godnesse wunye.

[2] Text in Halliwell and Wright's *Reliquiae Antiquae*, i. 208 *sq.*, or Morris's *Old English Miscellany*, p. 1 *sq.* Extract in the latter's and Professor Skeat's *Specimens*, i. 133 :—

The leun stant on hille,
And he man hunten here,
Other thurg his nese smel
Smake that he negge,
Bi wilc weie so he wile
To dele nither wenden,
Alle hise fet-steppes
After him he filleth,
Drageth dust with his stert
Ther he [dun] steppeth,
Other dust other deu,
That he ne cunne is finden,
Driueth dun to his den
Thar he him bergen wille.

cated, and more interesting material. To a careless eye its rhythm may seem a mere "heap"—to use the Guestian word. The most obvious, and for some time the only obvious, point is that of a sort of six-syllable line, which on the one hand combines itself awkwardly into very rough Alexandrines, and on the other seems but a slight advance, if any advance at all, on the old coupled versicles. That the six-syllable distribution is not merely haphazard is a notion which may find some comfort and confirmation in the facts, that though the *Bestiary* may be a translation from the Latin hexameters of Thetbaldus, the translator (almost, if not quite certainly) had before him the earlier *Bestiaire* in French of Philippe de Thaun, which is written in correct six-syllable couplets, or split Alexandrines rhymed internally at the cæsura.[1] We can thus see that the same sort of conscious or unconscious struggle is going on in the mind of the compiler with reference to the hexasyllabic couplet as was going on in Layamon with reference to the octosyllabic—that, so to speak, the old asyllabic and ametric versicle was sounding in one ear and the new tight couplet in the other.

The suspicion is strengthened when we come to observe the part that is played by the great innovator and psychagogue, Rhyme. In the first stanza or *laisse* given below a merely modern reader might be excused for thinking that there is no rhyme at all; there are actually, out of fourteen verses, no two consecutive ones that have anything like full rhyme, nor in the second of eight, nor in the third of four. It is not till the close of the first "signification"—till lines 38 and 39—that we come

[1] Thetbaldus (Morris, *Old English Miscellany*, p. 201):—

Nam leo stans fortis super alta cacumina montis,
Qualicunque via vallis descendit ad ima,
Si venatorem per notum sentit odorem,
Cauda cuncta linit quae pes vestigia figit.

Philippe de Thaun (Wright, *Science during the Middle Ages*, London, 1841, p. 77):—

Uncore dit Escripture
Leuns ad tele nature,
Quant l'om le vait chazant,
De sa cue en fuiant
Desfait sa trace en terre,
Que hom ne l' sace querre;
Ceo est grant signefiance,
Aiez en remembrance.

to a frankly rhymed but very unequally lengthened couplet.[1]

But if we look a little closer and further, several things strike us. Even in the opening there is a floating Lycidas-like rhyme of the *-ille* sound. The second *laisse* of the "signification" starts with three exactly rhymed couplets (*was*, *was*, *lai*, *dai*, *swo*, *tho*), and then shows unmistakable symptoms of *alternate* rhyme (*porden*, *is*; *folde*, *sep*; *wille*, *work*, *wille*), the whole constituting something like a roughly rhyme-bound stanza of thirteen lines. The second "chapter," as we may say—that of the Eagle—goes right off, after one unrhymed line, with seventeen couplets of irreproachable consonance, and very fairly exact length of line, and follows this with a "signification" of thirty-two, arranged in alternately rhymed quatrains, in which only two or three rhymes fail of strict exactness.[2] The third chapter, "the Serpent," relapses; but throughout the poem (which consists of just over 800 lines) we find a constant *nisus* towards rhyme, not merely in couplets, but in stanza-arrangement. Nay, when we look back to the opening, and on again to those parts of the sequel which seem regular, we discern this *nisus* more and more clearly. Actual rhymes crop up at odd places as if the poet, unable to find them where they ought to be, was determined to catch and keep them when they did present themselves. Assonance—a thing never much practised in English, but the natural resource of the unskilful rhymer, more particularly in times when he must have had reams of assonanced French poetry before him—is very prevalent in these same places. In short, the drift is unmistakable, and it washes him sometimes into perfect carol-cadence.[3] For

[1] Marie by name,
The him bar to manne frame.

[2] And one of these, "Satanas" and "Crist," is very likely intentional.

[3] The lilt of this is remarkable :—

Àl | is màn | so ìs|tis èrn,
Wùl|de gè|nu lìs|ten,
Old | in hì|se sìn|nes dern,
Or hè | bicùm|eth crìs|ten.

"Good King Wenceslas" seven hundred years ago!

the blind, or almost blind, gropings of Layamon we have the perception at least of "men as trees walking," and perhaps something more, at times something much more.

Of the other poems printed by Dr. Morris in *An Old English Miscellany*, "The Passion of Our Lord"[1] is in the long, swinging metre emphatically rhymed at the end and strongly divided at the middle, to which, as we have seen, the author of the *Moral Ode* was settling, and to which his successive copyists drew nearer and nearer, as the national ear cleared and the national tongue grew more obedient thereto. But *Sinners Beware*[2] gives us a new thing. Here is probably the first attempt to imitate (from Provençal or from Latin?) a measure producing the famous, and for some seven centuries never forgotten, romance-stanza, of six lines rhymed *aabaab*. The foot arrangement is, as we should expect, less advanced. Instead of the regular 886886 we get a rough 6 or 7 throughout—the half-Alexandrine having naturally, in these early times, an irresistible influence over novices in foot-prosody. But, in what we may call a sort of transposed value, the rhythm is very well kept; the rhymes are achieved almost miraculously well, and the whole is of more than fair accomplishment. In fact the writers of the time were evidently taking heart of grace, and losing their stammer altogether. *The Joys of the Virgin*[3] attempts another stanza, *abababab*, still on a basis of six- or seven-syllable lines, but often reaching the full eight, and observing the rhythm-value right cunningly.

Sinners Beware, etc.

[1] Ihereth nu one lutele tale that ich eu wille telle,
As we vyndeth hit iwrite in the godspelle,
Nis hit nouht of Karlemeyne ne of the Duzeper,
As of Cristes thruwinge thet he tholede her.

How far are we from "The Queen was in the parlour"? and how far from Caedmon?

[2] Theos Holy Gostes myhte,
Vs helpe and rede and dihte,
And wisse us and theche.
To wyten us wyth than unwihte,
That bi daye and bi nihte,
Thencheth us to bi-peche.

[3] Levedy for thare blisse,
That thu heddest at the frume,
Tho thu wistest myd iwisse,
That Jhesus wolde beo thi sune,
The hwile we beoth on live thisse,
Sunnen to don is ure wune,
Help us nu that we ne mysse
Of that lif that is to cume.

The *Love-Rune.*

This is also the metre of the *Love-Rune*,[1] a descant of heavenly as opposed to earthly love, which certainly gives the best poetry of the whole batch, and shows how little to seek in these new measures English poets by this time were. In this piece and in others of the group, whether by the same hand or not, the last obsession of the unrhymed and unmetred versicle, which was at the moment holding its dead hand on the spirit of the later version of Layamon, has disappeared entirely. Such constraint as there is, is of a different kind. The danger which had shown itself nearly half a century earlier in the *Ormulum* —which was to show itself again and again till the eighteenth century was almost closed—but which was kept off, first by the ballad writers and the authors of such pieces as *E.I.O.* earlier, and the *Nut-brown Maid* later, by the great dramatists and the song-men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by the followers of Prior in the eighteenth itself—the danger that English poetry should, like French, be tied down to the iamb—was beginning. It could not be helped, it was the natural reaction. But it was merely the exaggeration of a great and beneficent alterative which had given us the rhythm, not of recitative or of sing-song, but of real, metrical, musical poetry.

The Owl and the Nightingale.

In *The Owl and the Nightingale*[2] we come to one of

[1] Composed by Thomas of Hales, a Minorite, at the instance of a certain girl dedicated to God. The second stanza may serve as a specimen :—

Mayde her thu myht beholde,
This worldes luve nys bute o res,
And is by-set so fele-volde,
Vikel and frakel and wok and les.
Theos theines that her weren bolde,
Beoth aglyden so wyndes bles,
Under molde hi liggeth colde,
And faleweth so doth medewe gres.

It is inexpressible what a joy the first occurrence of such rhythms as "Vi|kel and frak|el and wok | and les," of such an internal rhyme as "Under molde hi liggeth colde," gives one. The very bones of an Englishman under the cold mould itself ought to start and tremble at the hearing of them.

[2] Ed. Wright, Percy Society, London, 1843. Also by Stratmann later (Krefeld, 1868), and a long specimen in M. & S. The best piece for illustration is perhaps the following accusation of the Owl :—

Wi nultu singe an other theode,
War hit is muchele more neode?
Thu neaver ne singst in Irlonde,
Ne thu ne cumest nogt in Scotlonde:
Hwi nultu fare to Noreweie?
And singen men of Galeweie?
Thar beoth men that lutel kunne
Of songe that is bineothe the sunne;
Wi nultu thare preoste singe,
And teche of thire writelinge?
And wisi heom mid thire stevene,
Hu engeles singeth in heovene?
Thu farest so doth an ydel wel,
That springeth bi burne that is snel,
And let for druge the dune,
And flohth on idel thar a-dune.

those "sports" or exceptions which, as the *Ormulum* had done fifty years before, prove the rule and enlighten the way for us. We have seen how Layamon and others were constantly making for (and sometimes actually achieving for a couplet or two, but then as constantly missing or "messing") the regular unequivalenced iambic dimeter couplet which had already established itself (*without* equivalence) as the most popular metre of French for all but epic purposes, while it was adjusting itself to these also in the form of Romance. The characteristics of this metre in French are rigid syllabic symmetry, regular rhyme in couplets, cæsura almost invariably in the middle, and a fully classical elision of final vowels before initial vowels in the next word. The author of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, be he Nicholas of Guildford or another, has attained this metre as nobody before him has. If he does not fulfil all the rules just given with unerring exactness—and I am by no means sure that such transgressions (they are not many) as do appear are not more apparent than real—his obedience is a prevailing rule, his disobedience an unimportant exception.

Tendency to syllabic rigidity.

Whoever he was he must have been a person of literary, if not of definitely poetical, ability, superior to that of most of his contemporaries, and he has made a very good piece of work of this poem. It shows us the immense advance which had been made in imposing the mould of metre—of regular rhythm—on the loose and shifting cadences of Anglo-Saxon poetry. But it warns us, as the *Ormulum* had warned us, of the danger of turning this mould into a cramp, and of fettering English in that strict syllabic uniformity which has been so great a hamper to French.

The correctives of this.

Of this danger, however, it would have been, and but for certain later phenomena would still be, "seeing ghosts by daylight" to feel very much alarm. There were, indeed, at the time three great preservatives from it. One was the considerable amount of resisting force in the old sing-song, the old versicle-recitative—a force which was, as we shall see, to accomplish a great though partial reaction later. The second was the hold which the true

though new English principle of equivalenced scansion was beginning to take on the ears and tongues and minds of men. The third was a fancy—germane to that for the rigid couplet, but indirectly serving as antidote to its bane—for imitations of the regular but very intricate and "symphonic" stanza-measures which had for some time been popular in Latin, Provençal, and French. The first of these influences we may see exemplified in a pair of most interesting works (renewing for us that opportunity of comparison, of the same or extremely similar matter at a slight distance of time, which we have had before), the *Proverbs* of "Alfred" and of "Hendyng." The second is put on record for ever—though the teaching of this record men have been singularly slow to learn—in *Genesis and Exodus*. The third (best shown in the famous group of Lyrics, of which *Alison* is the queen) is quite obvious, and most interestingly and valuably obvious, in a couple of poems, "A Song to the Virgin" and "A Song on the Passion," which Dr. Morris published in his *Old English Miscellany*.[1]

Versicular survival—*Proverbs of Alfred.*

The *Proverbs of Alfred*[2] are among the documents most tempting to desertion of our proper line and dis-

[1] Pp. 194 and 197. The first is parcel-Latin, especially in its short lines —"*Tam pia*," "*Maria*," etc. The second is pure English, and very beautiful. But though Dr. Morris put them within the thirteenth century, they seem to me almost beyond its prosodic accomplishment. I have, therefore, put them "on the bridge" between thirteenth and fourteenth, *i.e.* on p. 86.

[2] In *An Old English Miscellany* and (partly) in the *Specimens*.

I.

At Seuorde
sete theynes monye,
fele biscopes,
and feole bok-ilered,
Eorles prute,
knyhtes egleche,
Thar wes the eorl Alurich,
of thare lawe swithe wis,
And ek Ealured
Englene hurde,
Englene durlyng;
On Englene londe he wes kyng.

XXII.

Thus queth Alured.
Ne gabbe thu ne schotte,
ne chid thu wyth none sotte,
ne myd manyes cunnes tales,
ne chid thu with nenne dwales.
Ne never thu ne bi-gynne
to telle thine tythinges.
At nones fremannes borde
ne have thu to vale worde.
Mid fewe worde wismon
fele biluken wel con.
And *sottes bolt is sone i-scohte*
for thi ich hold hine for [a] dote,
that sayth al his wille
thanne he scholde beon stille.
For ofte tunge breketh bon
theyh heo seolf nabbe non.

quisition on their probable history. It is even not a desertion of that line to say that there is strong probability of their being in origin, if not coeval with the King himself, not so very much after his time, and so necessarily bearing trace of præ-metrical antiquity. But the oldest form which we have in Middle English is not put at much earlier than the middle of the thirteenth century. This form bears a certain resemblance in prosody to part of the *Bestiary*, and to the more unkempt portions of the *Brut*. Its beginning is purely versicular, with some by no means regular alliteration, no rhyme, and, for the first half-dozen lines at least, neither regular rhythm nor that fore-echo, as we have called it, of rhyme, assonance. These two latter things appear in the seventh and eighth lines, but actual rhyme not till the eleventh and twelfth, with only occasional and faltering returns of it for the first sixty or seventy.

Indeed, taking the various divisions, each of which begins with "Thus quoth Alfred," one is very much inclined to suspect that they represent *different* workings up of the older material, which was no doubt uniform—that some have passed through the hands of a writer or writers familiar with the new rhymed couplet, while others have not. Take, for instance, the twenty-second section—this, by the way, contains a proverb the occurrence of which both in Shakespeare and Bacon has been taken by certain persons to prove their identity, from which, of course, it will follow that both were Alfred, and that Alfred, or at least his thirteenth century adapter, was both. Omitting the usual ushering versicle, the seventeen lines of this present rhyme only once (in "begin" and "tydings," not quite perfectly), while the dimeter rhythm, acatalectic, catalectic, or brachycatalectic, if not the

XXIII.

Thus queth Alured.
Wis childe is fader blisse
If hit so bi-tydeth
that thu bern ibidest,
the hwile hit is lutel
ler him mon-thewes
thanne hit is wexynde ;
hit schal wende thar to.
the betere hit schal iwurthe
euer buuen eorthe.
Ac if thu him lest welde
werende on worlde
lude and stille
his owene wille.

full syllabic value, is fairly maintained. Take up the next, XXIII., and rhyme only emerges now and then, while the rhythm is uneven and often imperceptible.

Modified in *Proverbs of Hendyng.*

Then turn to the *Proverbs of Hendyng*,[1] which may be not more than a generation, and cannot, it would seem, be more than half a century, younger than the version of "Alfred." The matter is the same, but the form is absolutely different. The whole is thrown into the six-line stanza above described; with the Proverb itself, and "Quod Hendyng" added, as what we shall later find called a "bob," after the introductory verses. The rhyme is quite exact; the stanzas are properly arranged on the norm of 886 (7) 886 (7) with that licence of contraction and expansion of "foot" of which we have already spoken and shall speak more. In the one instance the clay has received only the slightest and most wavering impressions from the mould; in the second it is turned out in almost sculpturesque precision.

Genesis and Exodus.

Genesis and Exodus[2] is, I do not hesitate to say, the most interesting Middle English poem, from the point of view of our present enquiry, which has yet been discovered. It contains more of the kernel of English prosody, properly so called, than any single poem before Spenser; and upon it, as upon no other, can the battle, not of accentual *v.* quantitative, but of accentual *v.* foot-division metre be fought out.

My friend Professor Skeat, in that famous or should be famous disquisition contributed to Dr. Morris's edition forty years ago on the subject, which was (except Guest's remarks) the first, and on which no advance has generally

[1] I have these in *Reliquiae Antiquae* and in the Ælfric Society's issues. Plentiful extracts are in M. & S. The following may serve :—

Mon that wol of wysdam heren,
At wyse Hendyng he may lernen,
That wes Marcolues sone;
Gode thonkes and monie thewes
Forte teche fele shrewes;
For that wes ever is wone.
. . . . .
Wis mon halt is wordes ynne,
For he nul no gle begynne
Er he have tempred is pype.
Sot is sot, and that is sene,
For he wol speke wordes grene
Er then hue buen rype,
"Sottes bolt is sone shote,"
Quoth Hendyng.

[2] Ed. Morris, E.E.T.S., London, 1865. Prof. Skeat's Metrical Note is at p. xxxix.

been made, starts with a formulation of what I venture to think the wrong system. He bases it fairly enough, according to his invariable custom, on the far more generally known passage of Coleridge in reference to that unconscious revival, which he thought a new creation, of the metre in *Christabel*. "The essence of the system of versification which the poet has adopted is, briefly, that every line shall have *four accented* syllables in it; the unaccented syllables being left in some measure, as it were, to take care of themselves." This is a declaration, in fact, of the "accentual," the "beat," the "stress" system, against which it is one of the purposes of these volumes to wage truceless war. It was probably (though there are gainsayers, from a point of view which does not concern us, even of this) the principle of Anglo-Saxon versification: it is *not* the principle of English.

These, it may be said, are brave words; but where are your proofs?

I must have managed matters very badly if my proofs have not been accumulating from the beginning of this book. We have seen that during the Anglo-Saxon period, until its very close or near it, every line *had* to have not necessarily four, but some, and generally three or four, accented syllables, and that, according to some opinions at any rate, the unaccented syllables were "left to take care of themselves." Whichever view be true, it is undeniable, except by denying the authority of the ear, in which case *cadit quaestio*, that we can get, except rarely and in a staggering fashion, no rhythm out of Anglo-Saxon poetry save a grave and not ineffective sort of recitative—by no means disagreeable, by no means unmusical, but falling short, in a manner as distinct as it is irreconcilable, of *our* requirements of poetic music. We have seen how this poetry was confronted more and more as time went on with others, all of which possessed this music after a fashion, but that these were apt to submit it to restrictions, especially of the syllabic kind, which always brought the danger, and sometimes incurred the result, of monotony. In almost every instance (save the *Ormulum*

and *The Owl and Nightingale*) that we have hitherto surveyed, we have found clash and compromise between the two systems, the resultant of the conflicting forces being a rhythm more or less resembling that of French and Latin, but adopting escapements, easements, variations, identical in principle, though not in combination, with those of some classical verse, and retaining at least a semblance of the syllabic freedom, the unaccented expansibility, of Anglo-Saxon.

Now, to analyse *Genesis and Exodus* itself. Here is the actual opening :—

Man og | to luven | that ri|mes ren
The wis|seth wel | the loge|de men
Hu|man may | him | wel loken
Thog he | ne be le|red on | no boken.
Luven god and serven him ay
For he it hem wel gelden may,
And to alle cristenei men
Beren pais and luve bi-twen.
Than sal him almightin luven
Her bi-nethen and thund abuven,
And given him blisse and soulis reste[n]
That him sal eavermor lesten.

There is nothing here that we have not *in individual cases* seen before ; but the whole is infinitely more easy, accomplished, and masterly. It is, in fact, Spenser's *Oak and Briar*, and Coleridge's *Christabel* itself, more than three hundred years before the one, and more than five hundred before the other.

I desire to enter into no offensive polemic with Professor Skeat, but I shall be content to leave to the reader to decide, at least when he has seen their future application, which is the sounder set of principles—

(A) As Professor Skeat says :

That the unaccented syllables may be left to take care of themselves.

That to make iambic and trochaic lines convertible is to induce "all sorts of confusion," though it will be observed Professor Skeat elsewhere makes a trochaic scansion of *Boadicea* "exactly the same" as an iambic one.

That you can scan a line best by beginning at its end, since the accented syllables [the debauched villains!] instead of "drifting" about, will always be placed at the end of a foot, where they can be policed if necessary.

That "it does not much matter whether each foot has two or three syllables in it" [or four? or five?].

Or (B) as I should say:

That the norm of the line is always a certain number of "feet."

That though the constitution or arrangement of these feet may be uniform, the greatest melody is reached by variation of them.

That these variations need not always, though they generally do, contain one long syllable, and that the length may be brought about by different causes.

That such variant measures are always pretty closely equivalent.

That though they may be indulged in very largely, it is not a case of "going as you please," of "leaving things to take care of themselves," but that a too free indulgence in trisyllabic feet where the base is dissyllabic, or *vice versa*, will ruin, or at least damage everything.[1]

On this piece, as it seems to me, hang all the law and the prophets as regards Early Middle English prosody.[2] It is not, as in some of the cases which we have had before us, a document unimportant in bulk; it is not, like others, one which speaks with uncertain voice; it is not, like others again, or some of the same, a document where the artist is hardly an artist at all, where he is fumbling and botching with his implements, and shifting his eyes constantly from this pattern to that. It is a substantive poem as long, in number of lines, as half the *Odyssey* or a third of the *Æneid*, and telling a complicated and varied story, if not with original invention, with complete freedom of handling. There cannot be the slightest doubt in the

[1] Coleridge did make this mistake in parts of *Christabel*.

[2] In the author's own words, though he little thought of the application—

> God schilde hise sowle fro helle bale,
> The made it thus on Engel tale.

main about what the artist intended to do, different as may be the analyses of that intention; and there cannot be any that he succeeded perfectly in doing it. The poem is as regular in its apparent irregularity as *The Owl and the Nightingale*, its most interesting contemporary and contrast, is in its unmistakable regularity. Open it where you will and you will find the same unity in diversity, the springy limber dimeter shortening itself now and then by catalexis or anacrusis, lengthening itself before long by the substitution of anapæsts for iambics, but never to such an extent as to endanger the general rhythm of the line.[1] And everywhere, if you will keep your ears open and your eyes on the *Genesis* and the *Owl* together, you will see that between them, as wholes, there is really the same unity in diversity, the same constitution of the same general rhythm by foot-division, though in the one case the poet chooses to confine himself to a single norm of the foot, and in the other gives change for that norm.

Both these inestimable documents are dated by linguistic scholars (whose dicta in this examination we are, as has been said, all the more glad to accept because there can be no suspicion of collusion or connivance) at the very middle of the thirteenth century. The three groups, of even greater interest of *matter*, to which we are coming, are, for this reason or that, postponed to the end or near it, a postponement which, as it is made neither by us nor in our interest, but entirely confirms the lines of our general theory, we also accept very cheerfully indeed. Their attraction is different; but it is in all cases extraordinarily great from the general literary point of view, and hardly less from the prosodic. They are, if we may repeat to save referring, the Northumbrian Psalter,[2] the

The Northern Psalter.

[1] Here, as in the *Orison* and other places, *decasyllables*, not due to trisyllabic substitution, appear as—

> Nu, bi the feith ic og to King Pharaon (2187),
> He herde hem murnen, he hem freinde forquat (2053).

[2] For this in various forms see Horstmann, *Works of R. Rolle of Hampole*, etc., London, 1896, ii. 129 *sq.* Extracts in Morris and Skeat.

writings of or attributed to Robert of Gloucester, with a fringe of similar work, and the pair of earliest known romances, *Havelok* and *Horn*,[1] to which may be added one or two others of a *fabliau* kind. Hardly any one, who takes a sufficient interest in prosody to induce him to read this book, can fail to see the peculiar importance of an early version of the Psalms in any modern language. In the first place, the combined religious and poetical power of these wonderful compositions necessarily attracted the attention of the devout and the impressionable in every nation, as it was introduced by Christianity to the Jewish Scriptures; in the second, the use made of them in the services of the Church intensified and extended this familiarity; in the third, their matter irresistibly invites lyrical expression; and in the fourth, what may be called the catholic-canonical text of them, the Vulgate translation, though not metrical, has marvellous rhythmical and literary quality. In modern English the unapproachable beauty of the Authorised Version and Book of Common Prayer presentation of them, in rhythmical prose, has acted as a preventer of metrical renderings of any value; but in other languages the names of Marot, Luther, Buchanan, leap to the memory.

The special preciousness of *this* document consists in the fact that we have here a direct opportunity of comparison between Anglo-Saxon and Middle English. There was such in point of subject in the *Genesis*, but in point of subject only. Here we have beyond all doubt the same identical Vulgate text, rendered by the verse-smiths of the two periods. Let us take a passage—the ending of Psalm v. from the "Benedictine" A.S. version and from our present text. It is still, let us hope, superfluous to add or prefix the modern English version of *Verba mea auribus*, "Ponder my words, O Lord! consider my meditation," etc.

[1] There are some reasons from the point of view of literary history for including *Sir Tristrem* with these, but not from that of linguistics or that of prosody.

Word thu min onfoh, wuldres ealdor,
And mid earum gehyr, ece drihten !
Ongyt mine clypunga cuthum gereorde,
Beheald min gebed holdum mode !
Thu eart min cyning and eac ece god.

Grein-Wülker-Assmann, *Bibl. der A.S. Po.* iii. 329, Leipzig, 1898.

Myne wordes, lauerd, with eres byse ;
Understande the crie ofe me.
Behald unto my bede stevene,
Mi kynge and my god ofe heuene.

MS. Vesp. D. vii. ed. Horstmann, *R. Rolle of Hampole*, ii. 134, London, 1896.

Is it not, even from this one pair and parallel, inconceivable how any man can maintain, or ever have maintained, that the two poetries are constructed on the same prosodic principles ?

The unknown author or authors of this our earliest English version adopted the measure which, as the last two crucial examples will have shown, was the dominant one in his time, or a little before it. And this is natural, for no translator of the Psalms was likely to use an unfamiliar or a complicated form. That he took it in the form of the *Genesis*, not in the form of the *Owl*, would be almost a foregone conclusion from the fact (taking it to be one) of his northern domicile and dialect. But though both he and the author of *Genesis* were following the Bible, and following it no doubt from the Vulgate, the more lyrical character of the Psalms almost necessitated closer adherence to the sub-divisions of the original. He religiously adapts to each "verse" either a couplet or a quatrain, and this necessarily imposes certain conditions (which might occasionally be called clogs) upon him. But it at the same time makes for an even greater, though perhaps a less artistic, variety in the bulk and structure of his verses themselves, and induces him sometimes not merely to avail himself to the utmost of the liberty of his metre, but to go beyond it. We have seen that as early as *The Orison of Our Lady*, and even through the mastery of the *Christabel* metre possessed by the translator of

Genesis, there breaks something very like decasyllabic measure, which may be (this is necessarily a question to be postponed) the actual beginning of that great staple form in English. The appearances multiply here. But apart from this, and from the direct contrast with A.S., the Psalter has no special interest for us, and no new interest at all. It is valuable as confirming the existence, popularity, and growing variety of the four-foot couplet metre, with equivalent substitution, in English.

Robert of Gloucester.

We have, however, seen that there was another metre which had also "disentangled itself from the heap" very early, and which had qualities likely to rival in popularity those of the iambic couplet, while some of these were specially adapted to certain classes of subject. This is an adaptation of the old double versicle to the new prosody, which, though containing a pause in the middle to testify to its origin, does not separate itself into two lines so naturally as it falls into one; and, on the whole, even when compared with the other at its finest, sweeps as well as swings. It is, in fact, the metre of the *Moral Ode* rehandled. The rhythm of its line is still, in at least frequent tendency, rather trochaic than iambic, but it admits, and indeed courts, anapæstic substitution, and is often iambic frankly. Its superior advantages for narrative, especially when it is compared with the stricter and more impoverished form of the dimeter couplet, are obvious; and in particular it is a very effective metre for recitation—the monotony and sing-song which beset the stricter couplet, and are not always quite shaken off by the looser, being almost entirely absent from its sweeping volume. The qualities which have made *The Revenge* and *A Ballad of East and West* the common prey of elocutionists are apparent already in the rough moralisings of the *Ode*; they are still more apparent in the *Chronicle* which Robert of Gloucester certainly wrote in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and in a bulky collection of *Saints' Lives*, immensely popular, constantly rehandled, altered, and added to—the work, doubtless, in all their forms put together of

a very large number of writers, but in some of the earliest cases at least very probably, if not almost certainly, Robert's.[1]

The differences to be found between these examples of the metre produced in the last twenty years (in all probability) of the thirteenth century and those famous ones produced certainly in the last twenty years of the nineteenth, putting aside the "unpolished" (as Addison would have said) state of the language and some minor results of practice and patterns, are really very small. The older poet is too careful and too much troubled about his middle pause; he does not vary its character skilfully enough, and is apt, in his fear of overrunning, to pull up with a hard and throttling tug which involves a corresponding jolt at the start of the second half. This obsession of the pause, which certainly did exist in Old and to some extent in Early Middle English, which Guest and others would have ruthlessly transferred to modern, is a relic, of course, of the old versicular scansion. This would have become mere chaos without it; and, so long as it held sway, there was always a danger of that relapse, into versicular scansion itself, which at last actually happened, though partially and for a time only.

Further, the writer does not manage his substitution with the facility and art of his fellow-practitioner in the other form, as shown in *Genesis and Exodus*. If he wants more syllables he uses them, but he does not seem to be aware of the "lift" that they give to Pegasus. Still, all the "bones" (to use a vernacular phrase) of the full swinging ballad metre, in formation or use, are there, though they rattle a little and are rather dry, and unclothed with the soft, bright flesh that is to come on

[1] Of these later. For the *Chronicle* see Hearne's ed.; considerable extracts are in M. & S. Here is the vigorous rendering of William the Conqueror's retort to King Philip's gibe:—

Bi | the upri|sing of Jhe|su Crist, | if God | me wole gra|ce sende}
Vor | to make | mi chir|chegong, | and bring|e me of | this bende,
Suche wi|ves ichol|le mid | me lede, | and such | ligt at|ten ende,
That an | hundred | thousend | candlen, | and mo icholle | him tende,
Amidde | is lond | of Fran|ce, | and | is pru|te ssende
That a so|ri chirche|gong ichol|le him make, | ar ich than|ne we[nde].

This metre will occupy us constantly in the future, in itself and as "resolved" into the ballad form.

them. And once more the foot division is perfectly clear though not perfectly achieved. *Accentually*, Robert has little if anything to learn: it is in the turning of his "beats" into "feet" that he has much.

With the final group, the interest still mounts in point of matter, for we are at last in the presence of the greatest literary creation of the Middle Ages, and of one of the great literary creations of the world, that is to say, of the Romance. There is every reason to believe, from allusions—indeed it is fairly certain—that pretty numerous specimens of this great kind existed before the end of the thirteenth century, while, as we shall see, the main bulk of the best examples that we have were certainly in existence before the fourteenth was very far on its way. But there are two which for this reason and that (not the least important of the reasons being in all cases prosodic) are generally regarded as having a better claim to the early date than any other, and these are, as has been said, *Havelok the Dane* and *King Horn*.

The earliest Romances—*Havelok*.

It would be out of our way to go into the interesting and not improbable speculations tending to show or to argue that though both of these, and especially *Havelok*, were taken directly from the French, their mediate French originals had older English or Scandinavian ancestors in their turn. As always, let us stick to our texts.

Havelok is written in the iambic dimeter couplet, which we have already seen in full swing. It has not the scrupulous exactness of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, and indulges very commonly indeed in seven-syllable lines, while on the other hand it also indulges at times in the frank trisyllabic substitution of the *Genesis*. If the man who wrote it had been a dull fellow the piece would have been very rough and heavy. But fortunately he was possessed of a great knack of phrase and of narrative power, and these lighten and stir up his rough verse.[1]

[1] *The Princess Goldborough has been given against her will to Havelok, who is taken for a kitchen knave.*

On | the nith | als Golde|borw lay, For | she wen|de she were | bi-swike
So|ry and sor|wful was | she ay, That | she were ye|ven un|kyndelike.

King Horn.

Horn shows us something different. We have seen, on several occasions and in reference to several different poems, that there was for some time a certain hesitation whether the versicle-pair of Anglo-Saxon would settle down in English into a hexasyllabic or an octosyllabic couplet. The latter is much better suited to the genius of the language, and it had the valuable support, not merely of its French congener, but of the most usual base of Latin hymn lines. But the frequency of extremely short versicles in A.S. may have made for the hexasyllable, which in its turn was stoutly supported by the French Alexandrine with its strong centre-break, and perhaps to some extent even by the Latin hexameter. The octosyllable prevailed, and happily ; but its little sister always had a sort of sneaking charm for the English ear, and held her place in combined and alternated metres, if not exclusively.

In *Horn* it is still making a bid for the principal place, but in an irresolute fashion. So great indeed is this irresolution that the "beat-men" have endeavoured to claim *King Horn* as an example of "four-beat" octosyllabic couplet verse itself. This cannot be granted, though there are octosyllabic lines and even octosyllabic couplets in it, just as there are decasyllabic lines and even decasyllabic couplets in the other class. The swing of the pendulum in this line or couplet corresponds indeed exactly to that in its rival with proportionately smaller range. There are even lines of *four* syllables—that is to say, of five, allowing for the final *e*—and there are lines of eight, but very few, I think, of nine. Those of six and seven are the most common, and where the hexasyllabic lines do not include an *e* in the ending there is generally

---

O nith | she saw | there-in|ne a lith,
A swi|the fayr, | a swi|the bryth,
Al | so brith, | al | so shir
So | it were | a blase | of fir.
She lokede north and ek south
And saw it comen ut of his mouth
That lay bi hire in the bed.
No ferlike thou she were adred.
Thouthe she, "Wat may this bi-mene?
He beth heyman yet als y wene
He beth heyman, er he be ded."
One hise shuldre of gold red
She saw a swithe noble croiz,
Of an angel she herde a voyz,
"Goldeborw, let thi sorwe be,
For Havelok that haveth spuset the,
He kinges sone and kinges eyr,
That bikenneth that croiz so fayr."
Havelok, ed. Skeat, E.E.T.S. ll. 1247-1268.

a monosyllabic foot. In other words, the hexasyllabic norm is unmistakable.[1]

To these we must add the two extremely interesting *fabliau*-pieces of *Dame Siriz* and *The Vox and the Wolf*, both given[2] to readers for the first time by Thomas Wright, and both apparently dating well within the thirteenth century. The *Vox* is in octosyllabic dimeter[3] of an unusually springy and limber character, with abundant monosyllabic feet in the first place and a fair amount of trisyllabic substitution. *Dame Siriz* has still greater prosodic attraction, for it is a mixture of this same couplet (rather less springy but even more freely handled)[4] with nothing less than the "Romance six," the great *Sir Thopas* metre. In this the lines are treated with the same licence of contraction and expansion as in the couplet, and the lesson of the two is that of all the rest.

The earliest English *fabliaux*.

[1] The *anagnorisis* will serve as a specimen. Horn, disguised as a beggar and with blackened face, has dropped Rimenhild's ring in a cup of liquor she sent to him, and tells her that he himself is dead.

Rymenhild sede at the furste
"Herte! nu thu berste,
For Horn nastu namore
That the hath pined so sore."
Heo feol on hire bedde
Ther heo knifes hidde
To sle with hure King Lothe
And hure selve bothe,
In that ulke nigte,
If Horn come ne migte.
To herte knif heo sette
Ac Horn anon hire lette.
He wipede that blake of his swere,
And sede "Quen so dere
Ihc am Horn thin owe
Ne canstu me nogt knowe?
Ihc am Horn of Westernesse
In armes thu me cusse!"

Morris and Skeat (who give the whole), i. 275, ll. 1205-1224.

[2] The first in *Anecdota Literaria*, London, 1844, p. 2 *sq.*, and in *Latin Stories*, Percy Soc. 1842, p. xvi. *sq.*; the second in *Reliquiae Antiquae*, London, 1843-5, ii. 272 *sq.* (It is extraordinary but not unsatisfactory to possessors of this latter delightful book, that it has never been reprinted.)

[3] Text as in authorities. Some emendations are obvious but immaterial.

A vox gan out of the wode go
Afingret so that him wes wo;
He nes nevere in none wise
Afingret erour half so swithe.
He ne held nouther way ne strete
Fer him wes loth men to mete
Him were levere meten one hen
Than half an oundred wimmen.

[4] The 3rd and 6th lines of the stanzas are often monometrical ("withouten grief"), and the couplet verses are sometimes brachycatalectic, "As a wun|che that | is wo." But it also ought to have its specimen:—

"Welcomen art thou, leve sone;
And if ich mai other cone
In eni wise for the do,
I shal strengthen me ther-to;
For thi, leve sone, tel thou me
What thou woldest I dude for the."
"Bote leve Nelde, ful evele I fare;
I lede mi lif with tene and kare;
With muchel hounsele ich lede mi lif,
And that is for on suete wif
That heighte Margeri.
Ich have i-loved hire moni dai;
And of hire love hoe seith me nai,
Hider ich com for-thi.

Ed. cit. pp. 6, 7.

INTERCHAPTER I

In the foregoing Book it has been the writer's purpose, and his endeavour, to examine, with all the thoroughness and freedom from prejudice which he could muster, the actual, historical, documentary facts and circumstances of English prosody in its transition period from Anglo-Saxon towards, if not yet wholly to, the beginnings of Early Modern English verse. We have seen, in the first place, what systems of rhythmical or metrical arrangement an English poet of this time must, may, or can have had before him when he began to write. And we have seen —the attempt being to omit, as a whole or in sufficient sample, no single document of the slightest importance— what, in these two dim but momentous centuries from 1100 to 1300, English poets, with more or fewer of these models before them, did actually produce. We have taken these productions absolutely without prejudice; we have laid down no arbitrary or borrowed rules and laws for them. We have not declined to accept such a fact because it is at variance with our theory of prosody, or such another because it is at variance with our theory of pronunciation. We have added nothing to the evidence, as we have excluded and suppressed none of it. We have given the anomalies and the "heaps" of Layamon the same attention as the ordered punctuality of Nicholas, the fixed syllabic precision of the *Ormulum* no less weight than the swinging equivalence of the *Genesis and Exodus*. And we have only sought, by the combined exercise of the ordinary methods of comparison and inference, to find out what they all have to say.

The first thing that they have to say they say plainly —that Anglo-Saxon prosody is moribund if not actually defunct. On what principle that ear can be constructed which does not detect, between the rhythm of almost everything from Caedmon to the Rhyming Poem, and the rhythm of almost anything from the *Ormulum* to *Havelok*, a radical, a vital, an irreconcilable difference, I at least have failed to discover. The two deeps call to each other, and the voices of the two are as distinct as sounds can make themselves. As has been said (perhaps *ad nauseam*, but repetition is necessary), the rhythm of Anglo-Saxon poetry is a sort of half-prose recitative. The alliteration, the rudimentary parallelism of the versicles, and a certain grave, not inharmonious, but entirely *unmetrical* accompaniment furnished by the accents, give all that it boasts—all that it even seems to wish to boast. Regular metrical time, tune, "number," it never possesses for any considerable period; and its momentary hints of such things are uncertain and fragmentary. Something like the trochaic beat is occasionally perceptible—certainly it is more often perceptible than any other; but this is arranged in no correspondences; it has neither continuance nor reflex action; it is only a sort of "under-hum," a sort of singing in the ears, rather than any tune. One perfectly understands how it passed into the pleasantly rhythmed prose of Ælfric; one is not *un*prepared to follow those who recognise in its obscure cadences the source, still undried, of further prose rhythms of English down to the present day. But with the music of our *poetry* it has little more to do than the strummings of a child have to do with a finished symphony.

On the other hand, in all the poetry of our present period the rhythms that we know, though less perfect, are as unmistakable as they are in the poetry of the nineteenth century to an English ear which has kept itself true to English vocalisation, however familiar it may have become with others. That it may be possible to disguise and muffle this music by paying too sedulous

heed to theories of accent and of pronunciation I do not deny. Great is the power of theory; and of course, if you take it for granted that everything must then have been different—that "vowels were interchangeable and consonants do not count"—much may be done. But is it not, one asks in all modesty and sincerity, rather odd to summon the foreigner's vowel and other pronunciation in order to get rid of his rhythm? Is it not a rather more reasonable theory that we Englishmen talk very much as our ancestors talked when first the blend of "Saxon and Norman and Dane" historically established itself in our race and, to say the very least, historically coincided with these first appearances of our poetry? We are affectionately bidden to unlearn the impressions of our ignorance. Would it not be at least as reasonable to bid us, or some of us, distrust the impressions of our acquired and superinduced hypotheses? And may not those who have at least an equal literary acquaintance with all periods of English literature, who regard *Genesis and Exodus* and *Geraint and Enid* on lines of impartial friendship, and know the fourteenth century romance as they know the sixteenth-seventeenth century drama and the eighteenth-nineteenth century essay or novel—may they not (after a good many years of reading and thinking) have something to say?

At any rate to some such students there is no longer any doubt possible on the matter. From the wooden but unmistakable time-marking, unrhymed still, of the *Ormulum*, through the less wooden but almost equally regular and rhymed couplet work of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, to the beginnings of stanza, the rhythm at least is perfectly clear, and its lesson is perfectly clear likewise. Nor is the same rhythm, though worked out on less rigid laws, any the less marked in the larger and more imposing body of work from the *Orison of Our Lady* and the *Moral Ode* through *Genesis and Exodus*—the highest point of prosodic interest if not of either prosodic or literary accomplishment—to the "swingers" of Robert of Gloucester and his fellows, and the libertine

octosyllables and hexasyllables of *Havelok* and *Horn*. The poetic muse of English has "come to town" not yet in "velvet gown," in "rags and jags" comparatively speaking. But it has come; and the reverse of a plague with it.

But the most important, the most satisfactory, and (to those who will open their eyes) the most convincing set of documents is that the chief constituents of which are the Godric fragments, Layamon, and the *Proverbs of Alfred*. If after, and in especial immediately after, the versicular and non-metrical scansion of Anglo-Saxon, we had found metrical scansion as perfect as that of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, and *nothing but either this or the older scansion itself*, it would certainly have given us serious pause. And we should have been obliged to admit that there was something of a case for the suspicion of a deliberate, non-natural, head-and-shoulders hauling-in of "the rhythm of the foreigner"—that this last was as much superinduced on the different, the resisting, the true prosody of English as the Greek prosody of literary Latin was superinduced upon the Saturnian aboriginal. But the actual phenomena are as different as possible from this. They arrange themselves into four groups, and these four groups by the confession (nay, by the independent, previous, and entirely disinterested testimony) of men of the purest philological science, not tainted with any literary heresy at all, succeed each other in regular chronological order, or, where they overlap, display tendencies, "slopes," *nisus*, of an unmistakable character. The first is, for us, prehistoric—it consists of the Anglo-Saxon versification itself; and of that we have said enough. The second is the work of the twelfth century, now more immediately under consideration. Of this the Godric fragments, whether actually due to the saint or not, must be twelfth century; the *Proverbs of Alfred*, it is agreed by almost everybody, represent twelfth-century work, if not something much earlier; and nobody puts Layamon later than the very beginning of the thirteenth.

Every one of them tells the same tale, from the half-score

or score verses of Godric, to the fifteen or thirty thousand of Layamon, through the couple of dozen stanza-paragraphs (as we may almost call them) of the *Proverbs*. That tale is not so much the story of men who are deliberately endeavouring to conform to a particular prosodic system as that of men who are writing with two entirely different systems in their ears and before their eyes; who have lost complete executive grasp of the older; who have not gained complete executive grasp of the younger; but who exemplify first the one, then the other, accordingly as the respective tendency is uppermost. The scanty ejaculations of the Durham hermit cannot of course show us much; but they show what one might venture to call an "ettling at" the two great distinctive characteristics of the new prosody—regular rhythm and more or less regular rhyme. There is little room in them for flux and reflux. But there is fair room for this in the *Proverbs*, and almost the amplest possible for it in the *Brut*. Everything happens almost uncannily as it ought to happen. Especially in Layamon, which probably represents the work of a single man better than the *Proverbs* (for these may very likely have been taken from the older forms separately by different persons) is this the case. The almost or quite perfect rhymeless, accented, alliterated, versicle-pairs at the extreme right, and the almost or quite perfect rhymed and rhythmed couplets at the extreme left, are connected by a centre of all kinds of hybrid or transition forms; here versicles fallen into disarray on their own system, and not reformed on any other; there couplets which only want the last touch to get them in order, and in the centremost centre of all, admixtures of the two systems in almost every possible variety of composition. It is scarcely too wild a flight to call the work of Layamon the workshop, the experimental laboratory, of true English prosody. The lessons of its contents are so clear that one might think it impossible to read them in any but one way. There is not a page of the fourteen hundred—it is hardly extragavant to say that there is not a line of the two and thirty thousand—which will not give a text for our sermon.

Yet if any doubt remained, the two other bodies of instances are at hand to correct it. As has been said in a somewhat different form and connection already, the third of these bodies, the most important constituents of which very probably extend at pretty even distances over the whole of the thirteenth century itself, are the *Ormulum*, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the *Proverbs of Hendyng*, and some others. These show us something that looks at first sight like the completed result of the labours of the workshop—fixed metrical rhythm without rhyme, and attained by strict syllabic invariableness in the first; regular couplet rhyme and measure in the second; regular stanza of almost fixed syllabic line-construction in the third. But if we had had these only, we should have overshot the true mark. We might still have been led into the error—an error recurring constantly during the story we are endeavouring to tell, and not perhaps dead yet,—that the prosody of English is a fixed syllabic prosody, that it is altogether, or almost altogether, limited to "common time," strictly observed.

But the fourth group, the largest by far, the most various, the most interesting as literature, and the most pervading in date and otherwise, at once saves us from this error as to the result, and throws a flood of fresh light on the processes. The *Orison*, the *Moral Ode*, nearly all the minor poems, *Genesis and Exodus*, in greatest pride of place, the long "swingers" of late thirteenth-century narrative, the couplets of *Havelok* and *Horn*, the couplets and stanza-sixes of the two *fabliaux*, take up the lesson of what we have called the centre of the Layamon army, the first drafts and failures and fragments of the workshop of the *Brut*. We learn from them that there was something in the English genius which held it back from, which disinclined it to, the regular syllabic uniformity of French, even when tipped and adorned with rhyme, much more when unadorned therewith. After the nearly perfect rhymed couplets scattered here and there in Layamon, after the (as such wooden perfection goes) perfect syllabic "blanks" of Orm, there could clearly be no difficulty for

any Englishman who set his mind to it in doing what Nicholas of Guildford actually and constantly did, what others did more or less. A slip or two here or there might be as probable as pardonable, but so wide and as it were systematic an array of slips could not be accidental. Clearly something had survived from the old versicular prosody which the national ear, modified as it had been, was not prepared to abandon. And this something, as the patient examination of the facts should clearly show, was the preference of apparently, though by no means really, irregular length of line to the cast-iron uniformity of the French, and to some extent of Low Latin likewise. This might be done by omission of syllables, or even of whole feet (anacrusis and catalexis) at the beginning or end of lines, or it might be done by the substitution of trisyllabic or in some cases even apparently monosyllabic feet for dissyllabic. But it was done *quocunque modo*.

Even yet, however, it may not have been made quite clear exactly *what* in the writer's mind is the result which he thinks so clearly achieved, and exactly *what* he thinks to have been the methods and processes by which it was attained. Of these latter it is probably impossible to speak more advantageously than by the way (sometimes reviled but constantly useful) of metaphorical comparison. I am entirely unable to see, in the verse of the two centuries which we have been surveying, either a mere modification, with rhyme added, of the prosody discoverable in Anglo-Saxon, or a desertion and an apostasy to "the rhythm of the foreigner." It seems to me, on the evidence of the facts only and wholly, that just as Saxon and Norman and Celtic constituents, with political and ecclesiastical influence from Rome, were blending and coalescing to form the English nation, so corresponding influences (though in each case the Celtic might not make much show) were blending and coalescing to make English language in the first place, and English prosody in the next. And it seems further that, perhaps because there was least to do, perhaps because the poetic impulse is one of the earliest that shows, that, if not in perfection,

yet definitely and recognisably, the last change was effected somewhat earlier than the others.

To shift the handling, the view which is taken here is as of a plastic mass of decomposed or decomposing Anglo-Saxon verse-material, upon which are brought to bear, like multiplied potters' thumbs or like the tools of a lathe, the influences of Latin, of French, and perhaps of other languages, together with that infinitely more powerful though far more subtle and incalculable one of the race-spirit, which is forming and changing itself coincidently. That the finished results of this process disengage themselves slowly is no wonder; the real wonder is that they disengage themselves so soon, and that their forms when once really taken are so lasting. The differences, be it said once more, of English verse of 1000 and English verse of 1300 are differences of nature and kind; the differences of English verse in 1300 and 1900 are mere differences of practice and accomplishment.

What, yet once more, *are* the former differences?

As to the first, the most obvious, and in a sense perhaps the most important, rhyme—there is not much real quarrel. Even Dr. Guest, as we have seen, admitted (with perhaps a faint sigh) that all nations with accentual prosodies accept rhyme sooner or later. It is true that at intervals there have been revolts against this Queen-grace of poetry—a long and dangerous one in the sixteenth, and to some extent in the seventeenth century; a flicker of rebellion at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth; even a slight flash of that flicker lately. But only the first of these has been important even in appearance, and even that was in reality a vain thing—as impotent when boldly faced as the lions on the stair at Carbonek. So pleasant to the very eye, so delightful to the ear, so potent even upon the structure of the verse, so inexhaustibly fertile in fair offspring, is this youngest child of all the Muses, that, by a consummate irony, she has compelled her very blasphemers, such as Campion and Milton, to give some of the most charming examples of her power themselves.

Yet, great as is the power of rhyme as a time-beater, sufficient though it would probably have been to get us out of the half-formed versicle into the regularly moving verse, the example of French is enough to show that it would not by itself have given us the extraordinary elasticity and variety, the bird-chorus of trilling song which distinguishes English poetry, and which we begin to hear—if only so very faintly—at our actual period. Rhyme will cut the lengths of verse for you, and cut them fairly (perhaps exactly) even: and, what is more, it will create in the ear a craving which can only be satisfied by making these lengths coincide to some extent in internal distribution, by providing a certain succession of duller beats which shall lead up to the final ring-beat of the rhyme itself. But here (as we see in Low Latin as well as in French, and in all the Latin languages more or less) the positive and irresistible power of rhyme ceases. It may be able to do more; but it is by no means certain that it will exert this additional faculty.

Here, however, there was something in the old material, something antecedent to rhyme, which persevered, and which, uniting itself quite happily and harmoniously with the influence of rhyme itself, gave us what the French have lacked all through their literary history, and will perhaps never fully attain. This was—whether in changed or in unchanged form is a point on which doctors differ, but on which their difference does not affect our views or arguments—that peculiarity in Anglo-Saxon prosody which interspersed the accented pivots, pillars, or whatever you like to call them, with varying numbers of unaccented syllables. This peculiarity in the old prosody and its revival in the new, its partial disappearance again and its fresh revival, not only in spite of mere disuse but of repeated, well-meant, even still continuing, attempts to suppress and extirpate it, show that the national ear, the national taste, the national desire and appetence must have attached some special sweetness and excellence to it. And in spite of the contrary principle prevailing in the chief literary

examples before the experimenting poets, it held its own for the time at any rate.

But how did this new prosody execute its moulding and grouping? In what form? Under what laws? It is here that the rub lies.

One theory, which could not be introduced under better auspices than that of the author of the quotation partly given before, and more than once referred to, is this. The essence of the system of versification is, briefly, that every line shall have four, or five, or six, or seven (the number, as the supporters of this theory would cheerfully agree, makes no difference) accented or stressed syllables in it, the unaccented syllables being left "in some measure, as it were, to take care of themselves." Let us not for one moment put, or attempt to insinuate in any way the putting of, an unfair emphasis on these last words. "In some measure, as it were," is a proviso of weight, and it is perfectly well known to students of the subject, that Dr. Guest invented one of the most elaborate systems in the world, by which the occurrence and combination of the accented and unaccented syllables is subjected to a rigid mathematical calculus of variations. These, the ingenious author thought, might be tried *in extenso* by a painful poet, and the successful ones retained, the unsuccessful ones eliminated. But, putting this aside, there is one thing which not only appears from the above-quoted statements, but obviously lies at the bottom of *every* statement of the accent-men, the beat-men, the stress-men, or whatsoever name they prefer, and this is that they concentrate their attention on the accented or emphasised *syllables*. By these they count; these are the important things, the front-fighters; the rest are a mere *numerus*, less or more irregularly drilled.

According to the other way of looking at things, the accented syllables, the "long" syllables as we prefer to call them, are only a constituent part, and not even, as will be shown presently, a necessary constituent part of a body, which in these chances and changes has arisen to be the real constitutive element, the real integer, in

English poetry—a body which we call, merely for convenience, uniformity, and readiness of intelligence, the "foot," being quite as ready to call it the "hand" if anybody prefers it.[1] These feet, we admit—nay, we voluntarily and vigorously assert—did not exist in Anglo-Saxon. But they existed notoriously in classical prosody, and they really exist in French, though the rigid syllabic quality of that language, its tendency to rhetorical emphasis instead of poetical measure, and its peculiar *atony*, obscure them. Further, they are not merely observable, but, according to the demonstration just given, they cannot be missed, in the English poetry of the time which we have been surveying. They are present, as it were, "confusedly" and "dispersedly," though in different degrees of confusion and dispersion, in Layamon and the earlier fragments; they leap to the eye, in their wooden manner, like piano keys in Orm; and in proportion to the accomplishment of the authors, they are visible more or less in every piece that has hitherto come under our notice. Further, in at least some, if not in most, of these pieces, they observe correspondences, and present values, which, though by no means the same in symphonic adjustment, are very close in internal arrangement to those of classical feet. To transpose to this subject Dr. Guest's remark upon rhyme, we may say that no language which, without confining itself to strict syllabic counting, adopts metrical arrangement, can avoid falling into them. And their main laws are as follows:—

Every English verse which has disengaged itself from the versicle is composed, and all verses that are disengaging themselves therefrom show a *nisus* towards being composed, of feet of one, two, or three syllables.

[1] And having no insuperable objection even to "isochronous interval," though this, it is true, is subject to the remark of the irreverent undergraduate who had been reading Mill on Hamilton. He had, he said, no objection to speak of a "Permanent Possibility of Inamoration," but he thought it simpler to call it a "girl." Only, these "isochronous intervals" must be charged with articulate or inarticulate sounds, or with silences corresponding thereto.

The foot of one syllable is always long, strong, stressed, accented, what-not.[1]

The foot of two syllables usually consists of one long and one short syllable, and though it is not essential that either should come first, the short precedes rather more commonly.

The foot of three syllables never has more than one long syllable in it, and that syllable, save in the most exceptional rhythms, is always the first or the third. In modern poetry, by no means usually, but not seldom, it has no long syllable at all.

So much for the feet themselves; now for the system of their selection and juxtaposition.

The foot of one syllable is practically not found except

***a*, In the first place of a line.**

***b*, In the last place of it.**

***c*, At a strong cæsura or break, it being almost invariably necessary that the voice should rest on it long enough to supply the missing companion to make up the equivalent of a "time and a half" at least.**

***d*, In very exceptional cases where the same trick of the voice is used apart from strict cæsura.**

The foot of two syllables, and that of three, may, subject to the rules below, be found anywhere.

But:

These feet of two and three syllables may be very freely substituted for each other.

There is a certain metrical and rhythmical norm of the line which must not be confused by too frequent substitutions.

In no case, or in hardly any case, must such com-

[1] Except, to speak paradoxically, when it is nothing at all. The pause-foot, the "equivalent of silence," is by no means an impossible or unknown thing in English poetry, as we shall see later.

binations be put together so that a juxtaposition of more than three short syllables results.

And, similarly, the licence of monosyllabic beginnings, terminations, or pauses must be sparingly used.

The facts and documents already furnished will, or should, enable any tolerably attentive reader to judge for himself how far these principles are actually illustrated in the period at which we have arrived. I shall only say that I am prepared to apply them, with the cautions prefixed, to every passage.

Let there be put in this place, as a final consideration or group of final considerations for men of understanding, no more than the following :—

On the one side—in the theory of Guest [1] as a daring and admirably supported extreme of consistent audacity, and in many shades of bargain and compromise, receding from it towards the centre from which *we* diverge in the other direction—there is a system of English prosody, which in the extreme makes some of the best results of modern English poetry acts of high treason towards the theory of English poetry itself, and which in the less extreme varieties represents that poetry as having passed through stages antipathetic, if not directly contradictory, to each other in the most important points. These systems do not merely require the ordinary postulate of development ; they are not satisfied with the recognition and explanation of erroneous theory on the part of critics, and with the admittance of practice in accordance with these theories. They make the whole history of prosody for the last eight hundred years a thing not merely of shreds and patches, not merely of maxima and minima, but of disorder and chaos, of sixes and sevens. According to them, if you attempt (which hardly any one of them

[1] I am, of course, well aware that nobody, or hardly anybody, *avows* Guestianity now ; that it is, in fact, used by the beat-men as a convenient tub for the whale, a readily sacrificed child for the wolves. It is none the less the only systematic and (the *a priori* method being granted) satisfactory dealing with the facts on their side, or indeed on any, up to the present day, and as such may fairly be utilised.

except Guest's own has attempted) to make a continuous history of the subject, you must grant that at one point of that history two and two made four, and that at another two and two made five. They invoke science to their aid ; but they throughout violate that first principle which constitutes the charter of science—the permanence and inviolability of law.

In the system which has been sketched, and which, the Fates and the Muses permitting, will be filled in here, there is nothing of this sort. It is natural, it is historical, it blinks nothing, conjectures nothing, argues nothing out because it is inconvenient ; judges by the fruit only, and rules no fruit bad because it does not adapt itself to preconceived theories about the tree. Even in regard to the antecedent stage of English literature—the Anglo-Saxon period—it attempts no "black mark." It simply recognises what the purest linguist cannot deny, that at that time the constituents of English language were not fully mustered or incorporated, and draws the conclusion that it would be idle to suppose any similar muster and incorporation of the principles of English prosody. From the time when the elements of the constituency were fully present it is prepared to deal with everything, for the simple reason that it insists on adapting itself to everything that exists — to everything, at least every good thing, that presents itself. It does not, like Guest, say that some of Shakespeare's and Milton's most beautiful things are contrary to principle, and that the most effective rhythms of Burns and of Coleridge "have very little to recommend them." It does not, like Atterbury, dismiss the best work before Mr. Waller as downright prose tagged with rhyme. It does not, like the rasher critics and poets of the Romantic outburst—like Mr. Arnold even, who was hardly a conscious Romantic—brand Dryden and Pope as classics of our prose. It does not, like some of the early and not so very early critics of Tennyson, consign his most exquisite harmonies to the uncovenanted mercies of "Chinese poetry." It does not, like respected persons of to-day, rule out things as not Chaucer's because

they disagree with its own inventions as to Chaucer's prosody. Its motto is, "Let every good thing come in. And if I cannot make a theory which will square with the goodness of all of them, you shall, with my free consent, call what I do make a bad theory."

But while sufferance of the entrance of all good things is one great principle of this system, it is not in the least obliged to commit itself to a chaotic and libertine promiscuity. On the contrary, it insists that certain principles of true English prosody manifest themselves, as we have tried to show, at the earliest time when any such manifestation was possible, and that they persevere throughout the history—that while no other system adapts itself with such complaisance to the goodness of all good English poetry, none shows with greater force and finality the badness of such English poetry as is bad. To justify this boast must be the task of the rest of the book; let it suffice here to have laid, and in so far as seemed decent to have defended, the laying of the foundations.

NOTE (*v. sup.* p. 58).—Here are, side by side, stanzas of the two pieces, from MS. Egerton, 613 :—

Of on that is so fayr and bright,
Velud maris stella,
Brighter than the dayis light,
Parens et puella.
Ic crie to the thou se to me,
Levedy, preye thi sone for me.
Tam pia,
That ic mote come to the,
Maria!

Somer is comen and winter gon,
This day beginniz to longe,
And this foules everichon,
Joye hem wit songe;
So stronge kare me bint,
Al wit joye that is funde
In londe,
Al for a child
That is so milde
Of honde.

Not far from *Alison* and *Tristrem*, these! We shall have further opportunities of noticing the effects of such scraps of foreign tongues.

BOOK II

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE METRICAL ROMANCES

Scale and matter of the period—The general prosodic phenomena of metrical Romance—The Auchinleck MS.—The octosyllabic couplet poems—Those in "Romance stanza"—Origin and character of this—Other stanzas: *Sir Tristrem*—Others—*Lybius Disconus*, etc.

Scale and matter of the period.

ACCORDING to the older suppositions Chaucer was born not long after the end of the first quarter of the fourteenth century; according to the newer and now accepted one, at the close of its fourth decade. But little of his work, and none of the most characteristic part of it, is assigned by any one to a period much before the *last* quarter, or at all before the last third. The earliest form of his great contemporary and opposite Langland's work is not put before the seventh decade, and Gower's English verse of importance must be still later. Practically, therefore, before we come to these great substantive figures we have, from our last date 1298, a full lifetime of threescore and ten years, in which English verse was exercising itself, so as to be ready for them when they appeared. This period gives us hardly any *workers* even known by name, and perhaps not one of individual character, except Richard Rolle of Hampole. But it gives us an immense quantity of *work* of the most various kinds, now fully available for study. And to this we must turn.

It is curiously double in character. On the one hand we have, in the great bulk of romance during the first quarter of the century, in the almost perfectly formed

lyrics of MS. Harl. 2253, and in the *Cursor Mundi*, the completion of that assimilation of as much French and Latin prosody with the older elements as English would stand, and that production of a new blend—not a mere mechanical mixture but a genuine new kind—the steps of which have been traced in the foregoing Book. On the other, we have the singular and most interesting reactionary phenomenon of the resurrection of alliterative prosody.

The general prosodic phenomena of metrical Romance.

The metrical romances present by far the largest section in point of bulk, and (though hardly in any individual instance) in general substance and class the most interesting part, of earlier fourteenth-century verse-literature. How rapidly they grew is, as even cursory students of the subject know, well shown by the presence of a very large number of them in one particular collection, the Auchinleck MS., which belongs to the first half of the century.[1] The Middle Ages were indeed distinguished by this rapid dissemination and abundant production of certain works in classes; but the production at least was, no doubt, facilitated by the fact that in this branch of literature (nor in this only) the English forms were in some cases demonstrably, in nearly all probably, adaptations, though sometimes pretty free adaptations, of French. This fact has its special importance for us in the other fact that the great popularity of the iambic dimeter in France reflected itself on our own production. But at the same time it shows that the English copying was not slavish. For instance, the prosodic classification of some of the best known and most interesting Auchinleck romances is as follows:—

The Auchinleck MS.

Octosyllabic or Iambic Dimeter couplet: *Sir Degorè*, *King Alisaunder*, *The Seven Sages*, *Arthur and Merlin*, *Richard Cœur de Lion*, *Florice and Blancheflour*, *Guy of*

[1] It is to be regretted that this MS., which exists in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates at Edinburgh, has never been printed exactly as a whole. For prosodic, as for other literary purposes, reproductions of single MSS. are much more valuable than so-called "critical editions," which are in most cases "faked" according to this or that theory, and in all represent a blend of no ancient or certain authority.

Warwick (part), *Bevis of Hampton*, *Otuel*, *Lay le Frain*, *Sir Orpheo*.

"Romance stanza" of six lines, sometimes amplified on the same rhymes *aabaab* to twelve or more: *The King of Tars*, *Owain Miles*, *Amis and Amiloun*, *Guy of Warwick* (part), *Roland and Vernagu*, *Horn Child and Maiden Rimnild*.

Other stanzas to be specified presently: *Sir Tristrem*.

The octosyllabic couplet poems.

In the octosyllabic group we find, as we should expect, nothing quite so rough as *Havelok* or so ostentatiously brachycatalectic as *Horn*; but, as we should expect likewise, we find considerable variation, not only in individual accomplishment but in tendency either to the nearly French form of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, or to the specially English form of *Genesis and Exodus*. This latter is particularly noticeable in the interesting group of romances which, from this and other characteristics, but perhaps on somewhat insufficient grounds, have been thought to be by one author—*Alexander*, *Arthur and Merlin*, *Richard Cœur de Lion*, *The Seven Sages*. And of these, by accident or not, it is most noticeable in a poem specially English, not merely in subject but in tone and temper, in *Richard Cœur de Lion*—where there are passages which read as if they had come from the hands of Scott or of Coleridge. No new licences are admitted. Indeed, as we showed, the previous century had practically exhausted possibilities in this kind. But the practice is extended somewhat, and regularised still more, till it ranges through varieties of the norm which may be sampled below.[1]

[1] In two hundred lines of *The Seven Sages*, Percy Soc. version, ll. 1800-2000, there occur these :—

He | and hys | brother |

(brachycatalectic with monosyllabic first foot).

Is lyf | and on | wilk wyse |

(brachycatalectic simply).

The emperour toke with thaym a man anon

(either five foot, or normal with *very* free trisyllabic substitution).

For a continuous example the following may serve :—

Those in "Romance stanza."

We have seen so much less of the six-line romance stanza 886886, *aabaab*, that rather more may be said of it. The original selection, adoption, or construction of it, whichever term be preferred, is interesting from several points of view. It is probably not unphilosophical to see in it something of a compromise, in respect of preference of the base-line of eight or six. It would be more interesting still if we had facts sufficiently dated to be sure whether it or the apparently simpler ballad stanza

Origin

of 8686, *abab*, is the older.[1] "Apparently simple" only, for the origin of neither is so clearly likely to have preceded the other as it may seem, to one who only looks at the *prima facie* complexity of the two. Instead of rhyming the versicles of the long line (whence the couplet itself comes), rhyme the first *and second* versicles of *two* long lines, and you have the ballad metre at once, when it is remembered that there is a tendency from the very first to shorten this second versicle. But, on the other hand, take the continuous couplet, feel a sense of monotony in it, and add a shorter line *unrhymed*, and you have just one of those processes which we see going on

and character of this.

The kyn|ges dough|ter lay in | her bower,
With | her may|denys of | honour ;
Mar|gery | her nam|e hyght ;
Sche lo|vyd Ry|chard with alle | her myght.
At the | midday, | before | the noon,
To the pri|soner | sche wen|te soon,
And | with her|e mayd|enes three.
"Jayler," | she sayd|e, "let | me see
Thy pri|soners | now has|tyly !"
Blithe|ly he sayd|e, "Syk|yrly !"
Forth he | fette Rych|ard a|non ryght,
Fair he | grette | that la|dy bryght,
And say|de to her | with her|te free,
"What is | thy wil|le, La|dy, with me?"
Whenne | sche saw | him with ey|en twoo,
Her lo|ve sche cast | upon | hym tho,
And sayd, | "Rychard, | save God | above,
Of all|e thyng | moste I | thee love !"

Metrical Romances of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries, ed. Weber, Edinburgh, 1810, vol. ii. ; *Richard Cœur de Lion*, p. 37, ll. 879-896.

[In more cases it is possible, and even probable, that the scansion was by a monosyllabic foot at first and a trisyllabic to follow—"What | is thy wille," etc.]

[1] "Older" *in English*, I mean. See next note and Appendix on 'Metres."

abundantly in the Layamon "heap." Then, instead of leaving the inserted lines in the air, rhyme them on the couplet principle, and the thing is done. Its advantages are seen in our very earliest example, which in perfection is probably *Hendyng*, and the added and more artful music is exactly what would be likely to attract the hearers of recited poetry, as all the romances no doubt originally were. It is, moreover, sufficiently easy of composition, and it lends itself without the slightest difficulty to the needs of the improvisatore or the reciter from memory.[1]

On the other hand, it has drawbacks of its own, which, even without nearly a century of practice by good writers and bad, were sure to strike such a wit as that of its parodist Chaucer. It is not so merely monotonous as the octosyllabic couplet, but it has its own disease of sing-song and jog-trot. It requires very skilful management to make it a good vehicle for narrative, and (especially when expanded into twelves and eighteens, as is common) it can be appallingly heavy. But it seems (as indeed the selection of it for *Sir Thopas* would once more prove) to have been very popular; and it is in a certain, though only in a certain, fashion a prosodic advance. It is so even upon its simplest terms, its mere schedule and scheme; but it is much more so if the poet attempts to get, and succeeds in getting, the various and adjusted cadence of the different lines, which is possible if he combines his rhymes well, and avoids these worst dangers of the mediæval singer—stuffing and padding, surplusage and verbiage, merely to *get* rhyme and to fill in stanza. It is sometimes really, and even very, effective.[2]

[1] Of course the construction of these, as of more complicated forms, was greatly aided by, or—if any one prefers it—largely due to, Latin and French examples, to the *versus caudatus*, the *rime couée* in this case. But one of the most important things which have emerged to me in this enquiry is that all the greater metrical forms are at least partly the result of spontaneous effort at something new, not mere "dumped" foreign produce. As it is with the forms of story told, so it is with the forms of the verse that tells them; they are not stolen ready-made, they *grow*. To please some persons of worship, however, I shall endeavour to give more attention to this subject in the appendices of the present volume.

[2] Compare it in *Hendyng* (perhaps *c.* 1270), in a good middle example

Other stanzas: *Sir Tristrem.*

Still more dwelling is necessary on the more elaborate stanza forms. What *may* be their oldest example,[1] *Sir Tristrem*, is already written with some exactness on a very complicated model. The staple, as in *Horn*, is the six-syllable line, with the iambic rhythm much more clearly expressed and closely observed. There is a little trisyllabic equivalence, and the usual "canting over" of iambic into trochaic, or erection of the first syllable of iambic into a foot, occurs now and then. But as a rule the lines are exact enough to their norm.

Instead, however, of their being arranged in simple couplets, each rhyming but not intruding or extending its rhyme on anything else, an elaborate and uniform stanza appears. There are eleven lines in each, and the rhymes of these are arranged in an invariable order, *abababababcbc*.

But there is something else to notice. In all our couplet metres, except that of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, we

---

Guy of Warwick (Auch. MS., perhaps 1340), and in *Sir Thopas* (1390-1400) :—

a. Mon | that wol | of wys|dam heren,
At wy|se Hen|dyng he may ler[n]en,
That wes | Marcol|ues sone ;
Go|de thonk|es & mon|ie thewes
For | to te|che fe|le shreues,
For that | wes ev|er his wone.

b. Them|perour ros | amor|we y-wis,
And at | thi chir|che he herd | his messe,
In the first | tide of | the day—
And in |to his hall|e he | gan gon
And af|ter the stew|ard he ax|ed anon,
And the pil|grim without|en delay.

c. Lis|teth, lor|des, in good | entent,
And I | wol tell|e verrayment
Of mirth|e and of | solas ;
Al of | a knight | was fair | and gent
In bat|aille and | in tourneyment,
His nam|e was Sir | Thopas.

For Chaucer's *economy* in equivalence and yet his use of it *v. inf.*

[1] This debate is out of our line. If our *Sir T.* was the poem which Thomas of Erceldoune very probably wrote, it must be anterior, and perhaps a good deal anterior, to 1300. But few people now think that it is ; and both the complication and the exactness of the form are against it. But it must be earlier, and may be a good deal earlier, than 1350, from its occurring in the Auch. MS.

have seen that great occasional liberties were taken with the length of lines, the four-foot not unfrequently shrinking to three, and the three- to two, with half-way houses in each case. But these drops have hitherto been constructed on no system. Here[1] the ninth line—that of the first *c* rhyme—consists, and consists uniformly and regularly, of only a single foot of only two syllables (three with the final *e* as usual).

And here we have, *possibly* for the first time, except, as has been said, in the eight, eight, six, eight, eight, six of the *Proverbs of Hendyng*, our first regular stanza. The effect is not very good ; the short lines, as has been said, do not suit English *as a staple* ; the rhymes come with excessive frequency ; and the stamp and twirl of the final triplet, though an added grace, is a grace of a somewhat boarding-school fashion. Such as it is, however, we see it, and we know whence it comes. It comes from the elaborate stanza fashions of Northern and Southern France (it is not ours to attempt to settle whether the former were derived from the latter or not), and its object, conscious or unconscious, is twofold. The poet on the one hand desires to put himself under even stricter tutelage and supervision—to get farther from equivalence and syllabic variety than Nicholas of Guildford had done ; and he desires—not quite according to knowledge perhaps—to get more of the new musical accompaniment of rhyme. The "bob," or short-line pivot, became extremely popular, especially in mixed metrical and alliterative verse.

It is, indeed, a commonplace that stanzas are not as a rule extremely satisfactory vehicles for narrative ; but

[1] The king | had a dóuh|ter dere,
That mai|den Y|sonde hight,
That gle | was lef | to here
And ro|maun|ce to rede | aright.
Sir Tram|tris hir | gan lere,
Tho, | with al | his might,
What al|le poin|tes were
To se | the sothe | in sight,
To say,
In Yr|lond nas | no knight,
With Y|sonde | durst play.
Sir Tristrem, S.T.S., ed. M'Neill, ll. 1255-63.

they occupy a most important place in the general *exercitation* of our poetry in regular and complicated measures, and they are most interestingly connected, not merely with this, which is possibly their earliest extant example, but with three groups of poetry not inferior in interest to themselves—the lyrics already more than once referred to; the extremely curious batch of alliterated romances, etc., which find themselves unable to rely on alliteration only, and take, in various measures, rhyme- and stanza-arrangement for corroboratives; and lastly, the systematic verse-forms of the early drama. All these will be treated later.

Others. Moreover, they themselves, amid their various minor resemblances, differences, and consequent classifications, exhibit two principles of grouping which are by no means to be passed with slight attention. Some of them affect the "bob" form which we have seen in *Sir Tristrem*, and which is almost universal in the alliterative stanza class. Some, on the contrary, and most of those which are not alliterated, adopt a more uniform arrangement throughout—such as the distribution by threes of roughly equal length and identical rhyme with a fourth differing in both respects,[1] which is the natural carrying out of the common romance stanza just noticed, while that stanza itself is sometimes varied, as, for instance, into 888484, *aaabab*.

The stanza of *Lybius Disconus* has marks of earliness

[1] Hardely, | with-out|en delay,
The sex | to hom | hase ta|kyn up|pe Kay,
And then|ne Sir Baw|dewin | con say,
"Wille | ye a|ny more?"
The tother | unsquar|utte him | ther tille,
Sayd, "Thou | may weynd | quere | thou wille,
For thou | hase done | us noghte | but skille,
Gif we | be wowun | dut sore."
He brayd | aure to | the king,
With-owt|un any | letting,
He asshed | if he | had herd | any | tithing
In thayr|e hol|tus hore?
The knyght|e stedit | and stode,
Sayd, "Sir, | as I come | thro yon|dur wode,
I herd | ne se | butte gode,
Quere I | schuld fur | the fare."

Avowynge of King Arthur, ed. Robson, p. 78, stanza xlii.

The Blackburne MS., from which Robson's *Three Romances* are taken, gives a very rough, but all the more useful, text.

in its composition — twelve *sixes* rhymed like the eight-and-six twelve-lined romance stanza, *aabaabaabaab*.[1] It might indeed be regarded as a mere variation of the latter, made by some experimenter of more restlessness than genius ; but there is at least equal, if not greater, probability in the conjecture that it is an attempt to do for the hexasyllable, while it still maintained something of a fight for primacy, what was being done for the more prevailing line. This stanza is not, for a short space, entirely devoid of attraction ; but it soon becomes tedious, while the overdose of rhyme, in proportion to the syllables, also makes itself speedily felt. The lines are fairly regular in length, but adopt the usual licences to some extent. In two of the so-called Thornton Romances (later in transcription but not probably so in writing), as in the *Avowing of Arthur*, we find a sixteen-lined stanza displaying the above glanced-at arrangement, in quatrains consisting of a mono-rhymed triplet and a fourth line, rhymed differently but continuously throughout the stanza. The length of the components of the triplet varies in a fashion suggesting no great skill on the part of the authors. In *Sir Percevale* it is generally octosyllabic, with considerable waverings and shrinkages ; in *Sir Degravant* generally hexasyllabic, with considerable bulgings ; in the *Avowing* almost frankly chaotic. But the odd lines 4, 8, 12, and 16 are always pretty exactly sixes.[2]

[1] Tyll hyt | fell on | a day
He met|te Elene that may,
Wythin|ne the cas|tell tour :
To hym | sche gan | to say,
Syr knyght, | thou art fals | of fay
Ayens | the kyng | Artour.
For love | of a | woman
That of | sorce|ry kan,
Thou doost | greet dys|honour.
The la|dy of Syn|adowne
Lang | lyght yn | prisoun,
And that | ys greet | dolour.
Lyb. Disc. ed. Ritson, *Metrical Romances*, London, 1802, ii. 61, ll. 1435-1446.

[2] The child|e hadde won|nede in | the wodde,
He | knewe no|ther evyl|le ne gude,
The kynge | hymself|e un|derstode
He was | a wild|e manne ;

On the whole, the interest of these metrical romances, very great as it is from the general literary point of view, is considerably less from the prosodic. They carry on for us indeed, and enforce in the most unmistakable manner, with an imposing bulk of matter, and with sufficient variety of detail, the general demonstration of the last Book. We see in them, beyond all possibility of reasonable misconstruction, that English verse has definitely taken its "ply" in the direction of regular metrical arrangement and rhythm, constituted, as far as the two main influences go, by rhyme, and by the employment of definite but variable and exchangeable metrical units which may be called "feet" or anything else. We see the forms constructed on these principles multiplying, but always illustrating the general system in their multiplication. We owe to them

---

So faire | he spak|ke hym | withalle,
He lygh|tes dou|ne in | the haulle,
Bonde | his mere | amonge | thame alle,
And to | the bor|de wanne!
Bot | are he | myght e | bygynne
To | the me|te for | to wynne,
So comes | the re|de knyght|e inne
Eman|gez thame | righte thanne,
Pre|kande on | a re|de stede,
Blo|de re|de was | his wede,
He ma|de tha|me gam|ene fulle gnede,
With craft|es that | he canne.

Sir Percevale, Thornton Romances (Camden Soc., 1844), pp. 23, 24, ll. 593-608.

The knyth | hoves in | the feld
Bothe weth | ax and | with sheld;
The eorl | us dough | dere beheld
That | borlich | and bolde—
ffor he | was ar|med so clene,
With gold | azoure | fulle schene,
And with | his trewe | loves betweene,
Was | joy to | behold.
She | was | com|lech | y-clade,
T[w]o rych|e banrett|es hur lade,
Alle the | beaut[é] | sche hade
That | freely | to folde;
Wyth love | she wen|dus the knyght,
In hert | trewly | he hyeght,
That he | shalle love | that sweet wyght,
Acheve | how | hit wold.

Sir Degravant, Thornton Romances, p. 196, stanza xxix. ll. 449-464.

unquestionably, in virtue of their bulk, their number, and their extreme popularity, a great debt for helping to establish the new true blended system. But their importance, from any but this point of view, is a little injured by the fact that they almost invariably have direct French originals, and still more by the fact that, with the exception of the guessed-at author of the group above referred to, and perhaps one or two more, nobody of very remarkable talent seems to have been concerned in their production, while even this poet can hardly, without very lavish use of words, be called a genius. They are still, so to speak, *in statu pupillari*; but they are passing through a good curriculum, and their practice of it establishes that curriculum further.

CHAPTER II

ALLITERATIVE ROMANCE AND THE ALLITERATIVE REVIVAL GENERALLY

The reappearance of alliterative measure—Its character; interim comparison of Layamon and Langland—The wholly unrhymed poems: *William of Palerne*, etc.—Character and influence of their versification—The poems with rhyme and stanza—*Gawain and the Green Knight*—The *Awntyrs of Arthur*—The *Pistyl of Susan*—*The Pearl*—Merits and dangers of the blend—Character of the reaction generally.

The reappearance of alliterative measure.

METRICAL romance is, as we have seen, pretty plain sailing, and merely continues the lessons of the previous Book. With the other or alliterative division, as with the whole body of alliterative verse-work to which it belongs, the case is decidedly different. In the first place there is the unsolved and probably insoluble problem of its history and genesis. Those fortunate and patriotic persons who can afford to see nothing but accentual rhythm, with a little rhyme added, in the verse of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—who serve it straight as heir to Anglo-Saxon prosody—may have no difficulty here; to those who accept the facts, the difficulty, though likewise to be accepted, must seem very considerable. For a century, beyond all doubt and by distinct evidence, the set of the tide has been towards the disuse of alliteration, at least as in any sense a *constituent* of measure, towards the cultivation of distinctively metrical rhythm, and towards the constitution of this by the increasingly constant use of rhyme, and of metrically varied but harmonised time-units or feet. Nor does this tendency by any means disappear; on the contrary, as we have seen at the beginning of this Book

and shall see again in the latter part of it, the chief stream shows not the slightest alteration of direction, character, depth, or volume. In main channel it flows with ever more decided direction of current, in greater volume, rapidity, and force of flood. But now there arises a singular eddy or backwater, which continues in evidence for a whole century most strikingly, for two centuries more or less. What obstacle, what new confluent determined its first appearance, we really do not know in the very least. The one certain fact in connection with the matter is that this revived alliterative prosody, whether pure or blended—as in many if not most cases it is with metre and rhyme—is distinctly more noticeable in the North-Midland and Northern parts of the country, including Scotland, than in the Southern. Even so we have little or no evidence of it before the second quarter of the fourteenth century. The undoubtedly Northern *Cursor Mundi* does not show it at all; and a not impossible guess has been ventured that it may have had something to do with the great intellectual and religious stir effected about that time by the Yorkshire hermit, Richard Rolle of Hampole.[1]

Its character—interim comparison of Layamon and Langland.

However this may be, the actual phenomena of the phenomenon are sufficiently interesting; and we shall find as we examine them that, like those others which we have already examined, they work together for good in themselves, they work together for right as far as we are concerned. The first and most notable thing is that the old versicular arrangement, at a great distance from anything that seems to us poetical rhythm, makes no attempt at reappearance. Even Langland himself, the greatest genius in personal qualifications, and the greatest rebel to such characteristics of the newer prosody as rhyme, achieves, and apparently aims at, no such reaction as this.

[1] It has been suggested to me that, in my own terms, the "mass" was in parts "unthumbed" (*v. sup.* p. 79), and that these are specimens of it. The suggestion is ingenious and fair. But there is the broad fact that *nobody has yet produced an English poem of the slightest importance, in alliterative measure, dating even probably between* 1210 *and* 1340. And *hypotheses non fingo:* especially *de non existentibus.*

He probably was born not very far from the district where Layamon had lived and written a hundred and fifty years before, and a comparison of the two is full of invaluable teachings. Langland never admits—he was no doubt definitely aware of, and on his guard against—the lapses into rhymed couplet which are so frequent and so instructive in his predecessor. But he never gets—he never, we can hardly doubt, attempted to get—anywhere so near to the original rhythm of Caedmon and (if there was such a person) Cynewulf; it is much if he sometimes reminds us of the rhythmed prose of Ælfric. And as we shall see when we come to examine his work directly, he betrays compromises and condescendences of his own which are equally valuable. But he lies for the moment some way in front of us, and we have first to deal with the alliterative romances and the alliterative religious pieces, some of which pretty certainly, and most of which in all probability, came before his very earliest work.

The wholly unrhymed poems—*William of Palerne*, etc.

To appreciate this earlier crop we must take together romances and some non-romance poems: *William of Palerne*, *Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Awntyrs of Arthur*, but also the three remarkable poems, called *Patience*, *Cleanness*, and *The Pearl*, that accompany *Gawain* in its MS., and the *Pistyl of Susan*.

Of these only *William of Palerne*, *Patience*, and *Cleanness* dispense with rhyme altogether. There is no reason to suppose a common authorship of these pieces, but their versification is extremely similar. In none of the three is there any rhyme—final, internal, or alternative, and though not invariably, yet generally, the old rule of two alliterative syllables in the first half of the line and one in the second is kept as the distinguishing prosodic mark. On the other hand, the lines are kept fairly of a length, with very strong middle pause; though the second half is, as a rule, shorter than the first, it is not as much so as had been common of old.[1] What is more remarkable still, and indeed most remarkable of all, is that each of the lines falls, as a rule,

[1] I speak with the limitations acknowledged elsewhere; but after repeated samplings, everywhere in A.S., of the most normal lines.

roughly into the rhythm of a four-footed anapæstic metre, and, not only this, but each *half*-line, somewhat more roughly but still discernibly, into that of a two-footed anapæstic, the first half inclining to the prominence of a redundant final syllable, the second to the absence of that syllable, but in both cases with abundant exceptions.[1] The poets, moreover, though they never fail to preserve the rough anapæstic lilt, avail themselves very freely of what we have called the "patter" licence, which had disappeared from metrical verse. You must sometimes—the rhythm will force you, if you have an ear, to do so—run four syllables into a foot, besides allowing "catches" or anacruses at the beginning and extrametrical syllables at the end.[2]

Character and influence of their versification.

Rough, however, and licentious as this verse may seem, it has its own laws, it obeys them, and, like all measures, mice, and men in such conditions, it is respectable and satisfactory. It is the matrix, some may say, of

[1] A third difference, for the tendency of Anglo-Saxon rhythm, where there is any, is trochaic *predominantly*.

[2] This is, perhaps, a good place to say that, according to my view, no extrametrical syllables can be allowed except at the end or (and here rather doubtfully) the middle. Any scheme which recognises these escapements elsewhere is self-condemned. I subjoin a passage from *William of Palerne* and two from *Cleanness* :—

Hit bi-fel in that forest · there fast by-side,
Ther woned a wel old cherl · that was a couherde,
That fele winterres in that forest · fayre had kepud
Mennes ken of the cuntre · as a comen herde ;
And thus it bitide that time · as tellen oure bokes,
This cowherd comes on a time · to kepen is bestes
Fast by-side the borwz · there the barn was inne.
The herd had with him an hound · his hert to light,
Forto bayte on his bestes · wanne thai to brode went.
The herd sat than with hound · aghene the hote sunne,
Nought fully a furlong · fro that fayre child,
Clougtand kyndely his schon · as to here craft falles.
That while was the werwolf · went a-boute his praye,
What behoued to the barn · to bring as he might.

E.E.T.S., *W. of Palerne*, p. 6 ;
Morris and Skeat, ii. 138-139.

" Wende, worthelych wyght · vus wonez to seche,
Dryf ouer this dymme water · if thou druye fyndez,
Bryng bodworde to bot · blysse to vus alle ;
Thaz that fowle be false · fre be thou euer."
Ho wyrlez out on the weder · on wyngez ful scharpe,
Dreghly alle alonge day · that dorst neuer lyght ;

much future "tumbling" doggerel, but it is also the matrix of the great anapæstic tetrameter or dimeter which has given English poetry, from the seventeenth century to the present day, so much of its most stirring and effective work; and it has had other worthy developments. It possesses a pleasant "derry down" movement for narrative, and it is capable, as the author of *Cleanness* shows in the great exaltation of honest physical love, quoted below, of rhetorical adaptations to which it is hardly ridiculous to apply the term magnificent. Yet to all fairly attentive and fairly ingenuous observers it must be obvious that it still owes a great deal to the rival which it would seem to be trying to supplant, in equality of total measurement, in correspondence of parts, and, above all, in rhythm. In it first do we clearly see that substitution of anapæstic for trochaic movement which has been referred to, and which testifies to some remarkable change either in the mechanism of the national language or (which is indeed the same thing from another point of view) in the receptivity of the national ear.

The poems with rhyme and stanza.

Great, however, as are the confessions and compromises even in this most "stalwart" form of the reaction, those

---

And when ho fyndez no folde · her fote on to pyche,
Ho vmbe-kestez the coste · and the kyst sechez,
Ho hittez on the euentyde · and on the ark sittez;
Noe nymmes hir anon · and naytly hir stauez.
Cleanness, ed. Morris, p. 50, ll. 471-80; Morris and Skeat, ii. p. 159.

I compast hem a kynde crafte and kende hit hem derne,
And amed hit in myn ordenaunce oddely dere;
And dyght drwry therinne, doole alther-swettest,
And the play of paramores I portrayed my selven;
And made ther-to a maner myriest of other,
When two true togeder had tyghed hem-selven,
Bytwene a male and his make such merthe schulde come,
Wel nygh pure paradise moght preve no better.
Elles thay moght honestly ayther other welde,
At a stylle stollen steven, unstered wyth syght,
Luf-lowe hem bytwene lasched so hote,
That alle the meschefez on mold mought it not sleke.
Cleanness, ed. Morris, p. 57, ll. 697-708.

I venture to think Dr. Morris's punctuation and side-notes slightly mistaken in assigning the last lines to what follows, not what precedes. They are evidently based on Canticles viii. 6, 7, and relate to *honest* love.

of the other four are greater still. Taking the four poems (two romances and two religious pieces) which have been named we find the following results.

Gawain and the Green Knight.

The best and most attractive of all from the literary point of view—the most original as far as is yet known of all English romances—*Gawain and the Green Knight*, shows us at once one of those extremely interesting blends or coalescences in which the secret of the whole matter lies, and the ignoring of which by students has been at the root of the failure hitherto to take a catholic view of English prosody. The greater part of it consists of lines not distinguishable from those just considered in the three earlier cases. But, instead of being ranged continuously, these lines are separated, at intervals of no regular length, by the "bob and wheel" arrangement before referred to, the bob being of two syllables, and the wheel an irregular but unmistakable ballad-quatrain of 8686, or a quatrain of sixes rhymed alternately. Moreover, the bob rhymes with the second and fourth line of the quatrain. It should perhaps be said that alliteration appears in the wheel as well as in the *laisses* or batches of the main verse, but rather less regularly.[1]

[1] *Gawain has been hospitably received at a castle. His host's wife tempts him.*

Thenne ho gef hym god-day and wyth a glent laghed,
And as ho stod, ho stonyed hym with ful stor wordes,
"Now he that spedes uche spech, this disport yelde,
Bot that ye be Gawayn, hit gotz in mynde."
"Quer-fore!" qwod the freke, and freschly he askes
Ferde lest he hade fayled in fourme of his castes.
Bot the burde hym blessed, and bi this skyl sayde,
"So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden,
And cortaysye is closed so clene in hymselven,
Couth not lyghtly haf lenged so long wyth a lady,
Bot he had craved a cosse, bi his courtaysye,
Bi sum towch of summe tryfle, at sum talez ende."
Then quod Wowen, "I wysse, worthe as yow lykez,"
I shall kysse at your comaundement, as a knyght fallez,
And fere [?] lest he displez yow, so plede hit no more."
Ho comes nerre with that, and cachez hym in armez,
Loutez luflych adoun, and the leude kyssez;
Thay comly bykennen to Kryst ayther other;
Ho dos hir forth at the dore, withouten dyn more.
And he ryches hym to ryse, and rapes hym sone,
Clepes to his chamberlayn, choses his wede
Bozez forth, quen he watz boun, blythely to masse,

The *Awntyrs of Arthur.*

In the *Awntyrs of Arthur*, the *Pistyl of Susan*, and *The Pearl*, however, we find that the poets are not satisfied with even this compromise. They adopt, and indeed exaggerate, alliteration ; and their staple line, though still more "uniformed," is still that of the unrhymed pieces ; but they call to their aid a regular stanza with a fixed number of lines not less regularly arranged in rhyme. The *Awntyrs*, as the stanza quoted below will show at once, must have given the poet a great deal of trouble to write ; for he has to work out a stanza as complicated as the most complicated in the mere metre-poets, and he has the burden of alliteration as well. Eight lines of the formation just discussed, but very close to one another in syllable-length, and sometimes settling to an almost accomplished Alexandrine, are rhymed *abaabb* with scrupulous care, and followed by a ninth with a fresh rhyme-sound *c*. There is no "bob," but the wheel (usually 6664, and rhymed sometimes *bbbc*, but always in triplet and single) follows duly, the whole making a thirteen-lined stanza extremely curious and interesting to compare with the seeming chaos of a not so much earlier time.[1]

> And thenne he meved to his mete, that menskly him keped,
> And made myrry al day til the mone rysed,
> With game ;
> With [?] never freke fayrer fonge,
> Bitwene two so dyngne dame
> The alder and the yonge,
> Much solace set thay same.
> *G. and G. K.*, ed Morris, p. 41, ll. 1290-1318.

The final quatrain, it may be observed, *hovers round* its norm (whether this be 8686 or 6666) in a very interesting and Layamonian manner. Often enough to look as if it were meant, there is alternation of masculine and feminine rhyme, and sometimes, as in the "wonder" and "blunder" of the very first *laisse*, the feminine rhyme is a real "double."

[1] In the tyme of Arther thys antur be-tydde,
Be-syde the Tarnewathelan, as the boke tellus ;
That he to Karlylle was comun, that conquerour kydde,
Wythe dukys, and with dosiperus, that with the deure dwellus,
For to hunte atte the herd, that lung hase bynne hydde ;
Tyl on a day thay hom dyght into the depe dellus,
Fellun to tho femalus, in forest was fredde ;
Fayre by fermesones, by frythys, and felles,
To the wudde thay weyndun, these wlonkes in wedes ;
Bothe the kyng and the qwene,
And other doghti by-dene ;

The beautiful *Pistyl of Susan* is also in a thirteen-line stanza of similar general composition, but with slight differences, the most obvious and certain of which is the disappearance of the ninth long line and the reappearance of the single-footed "bob." Moreover, the triplet in the "wheel" less often than in the *Awntyrs* follows the *b* rhyme, and has one of its own, *d*.[1] The *Pistyl of Susan*.

But the climax of wayward intricacy is reached in the most charming of all the religious poems of this time, the so-called *Pearl*. If, as is almost certain,[2] this is the lament of an actual father over the death of his little daughter Margaret, it is a wonderful instance of pain finding not merely solace, but poetic accomplishment, in the "sad mechanic exercise" of the most complicated verse-forms. There is less variety of line-length, and intricacy of line-combination and rhyme within the stanza, than that to which we have been for some time accustomed. In fact, the poet has come back to the octosyllable, with some but not much licence of shortening and equivalence, and he arranges these lines in twelves, rhymed *abababababcbc*. The alliteration is very rich, for short as are his lines he *The Pearl*.

Syr Gawan, graythist on grene,
Dame Gaynore he ledus.
A. of A., ed. Robson, p. 1.

I have purposely chosen this the *roughest* (from the Blackburne MS.) of the versions in print. Those from the Douce and the Thornton, printed by Mr. Amours for the S.T.S., are before me; but they require no comment of importance prosodically.

[1] Als this schaply thing, yede in hire yarde
That was hir hosbondus, and hire that holden with hende,
"Nou folk be faren from us, thar us not be ferde;
Aftur myn oynement warliche ye weende;
Aspieth nou specialy the yates ben sperde,
ffor we wol wassche us I-wis bi this welle strende."
ffor-thi the wif werp of hir wedes un-werde;
Undur a lorere ful lowe that ladi gan leende
So sone.
By a wynliche welle,
Susan caste of hir kelle;
Bote feole ferlys hire bi-felle
Bi Midday or none.
Vernon MS. Poems, E.E.T.S., ii. p. 630, st. 10.

Four other versions, as well as the Vernon, may be found in Mr. Amours' *Alliterative Poems*; but, once more, they need no prosodic notes.

[2] It has been denied, of course, but the matter does not concern us so as to require argument.

never fails to get, into what corresponds to but half of the old versicle-pair, the *three* alliterations which had sufficed for the whole, and he sometimes manages *four*. Yet he is not a mere slave to this alliteration, and will sometimes drop it altogether.[1]

But he is not satisfied with even these refinements. The refrain occurs, as is well known, in one of the probably earliest of Anglo-Saxon poems, the *Complaint of Deor*, but if there were other examples (as no doubt there were) we have lost them; and in Early Middle English poetry the refrains of such pieces as the *Proverbs* of Alfred and of Hendyng have a mere value of meaning, none of poetry. In *The Pearl*, on the other hand, this feature is introduced with much deliberation and with an extremely beautiful effect. The curious thing is that the burden is seldom or never repeated *exactly*. But a line, similar sometimes in greater part, sometimes only in its last words,[2] binds a certain number (generally, but by no means invariably, *five*) of the above described douzains into a real living unity. It will be observed by a careful reader that as the rhyme of the *last* line has already occurred in the *tenth*, this "stanza of stanzas" necessarily has, running through

[1] Fro spot my spyryt ther sprang in space,
My body on balke ther bod in sweven,
My goste is gon in Godez grace,
In aventure ther mervaylez meven ;
I ne wyste in this worlde quere that hit wace,
But I knew me keste ther klyfez cleven ;
Towarde a foreste I bere the face,
Where rych rokkez wer to dyscreven :
The lyght of hem myght no man leven,
The glemande glory that of hem glent ;
For wern never webbez that wyvez weven
Of half so dere adubbement.

The Pearl, ed. Morris, p. 3, st. 2.

Mr. Gollancz's text is also before me.

[2] Thus the refrain given recurs as

In respecte of that adubbement.

. . . .

And here and se her adubbement.

. . . .

Lord ! dere wats that adubbement.

and

So dere watz hit adubbement.

All the refrains of the batches have this diversity in identity, only the last word being *de rigueur*, though sometimes much more is repeated.

the whole, not merely the rhyme of the refrain, but that of the lines rhyming to it, while the alliteration itself is also to some extent repeated necessarily at regular intervals. In mere description the result may seem likely to be laboured or heavy, but nothing can be farther from the actual fact. *The Pearl* is a sort of *carillon*—not indeed of joyful but of melancholy sweetness—a tangle, yet in no disorder, of symphonic sound, running and interlacing itself with an ineffable deliciousness. It is perhaps the only poem except the metrical Lyrics (themselves alliterative to some extent, yet strictly *metrical*) which, in this early period, shows the full possibilities of musical beauty in English verse.

Merits and dangers of the blend.

But we must not be carried away by the beauty of the more beautiful constituents of this batch, two of which, be it remembered, are generally if not, perhaps, convincingly attributed to the same hand, while all three have been set to its credit by the extremer fury of the agglomerator. There is not much beauty, though there is a good deal of rough vigour, in the *Awntyrs*; and the deficiencies and dangers of the general scheme can escape no careful thought. The charms of a very elaborate formal arrangement, when it is completely successful, are unmistakable by him whose ears Apollo has touched without lengthening. But the dangers of such an arrangement are equally clear. We see them on the one side in the practice at this time, or a little later, of the Latin races themselves, of the Italians in sonnet and sestine, of the French in ballade and Chant Royal. The form alone is too often eloquent, and its eloquence is apt to grow thinner and thinner. By our own race the form itself is so apt to be neglected, that if attention to it is regarded as the principal thing, no great harm is often done.

Character of the reaction generally.

This morality, however, is not the most important that can be drawn from the phenomena. The really useful lesson is that by this time—in the very moments of the alliterative reaction—the charms of rhyme were felt to be too great to resign. The charms of stanza-arrangement claimed and effected a similar hold, and the most instructive

and imperative of all "instructions to the committee," the necessity of line- and even of foot-arrangement,[1] forced itself, in the teeth of the principle of reaction itself, upon the practice of the reactionaries. It is as if a great rebellion of bowmen had, a little later, been organised against gunpowder; and the rebels had armed themselves with arquebuses and firelocks. The "rhythm of the foreigner" has triumphed: the actuality and the eventualities of common and triple time have not only "emerged from the heap" or lump, but have leavened the very recalcitrant residuum of the lump itself.

On the other hand, that the whole movement was in more than the literal sense retrograde is, I think, undeniable; though it had a real value as a protest, and as maintaining certain principles of English verse which were in danger of being obscured or even lost. These it did maintain, in the teeth of the tendency, constantly recurring in our prosodic history, to subject English to the bondage of syllabic uniformity, and by championing, if to an exaggerated and fantastic degree, the intensely English habit of alliteration itself. But had it triumphed it would have been a disaster; and even as it was, it very seldom contributed really satisfactory work to the body of English poetry. In the Debatable Lands of satiric and didactic verse, when the practitioners were persons of genius like Langland and Dunbar, the simple forms proved effective enough, and gave us *Piers Plowman* and *The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo.* But most forms have a habit of proving effective in the hands of persons of genius; and satire and didactics *are* but debatable lands, or kinds, in poetry. Of the ornater and more complicated species, and their perils, we have just spoken, while both simple alliterative verse, and alliterative verse

[1] Very unequally, and therefore I have abstained, in this chapter, from marking the feet. In *The Pearl* these feet are indeed unmistakable, but in the unrhymed parts of all the others, and even in the rhymed parts of some, though a vague general principle of cadence and time-units is clear enough, the composition of these units *is* of an accentual and go-as-you-please character. As such it led easily to the rambling or scrambling doggerel which succeeded it, and which was found a natural refuge during the paralysis of metre in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

compounded with stanza and rhyme, were subject to one fatal and essential drawback and danger,[1] the ever-present necessity—three, four, sometimes even five times in a verse—of choosing a word, not because it was right in sense or delightful in sound, but simply because it began with the same letter as others. Against this even genius fights helplessly too often; by anything short of genius it is invincible.

[1] Rhyme itself is, of course, not quite free from this danger, and has at times succumbed to it. But the peril is as nothing compared to that to which alliteration is constantly exposed. — Some readers may like to go directly from this Chapter to Chapter V., in which the remaining alliterators, including Langland, their greatest, are dealt with.—Of the poems which, whether in or out of Scots, have been claimed for "Huchowne" (*v. inf.* p. 187), *Golagros and Gawane*, as well as the certainly later *Booke of the Howlat* of Sir Richard Holland, and the anonymous and spirited *Rauf Coilyear*, approaches the *Awntyrs* and *Susane* very closely in prosodic character, and the former most closely. All three are in the thirteen-lined alliterative stanza, rhymed, with wheel but no bob. And all are in Mr. Amours' book.

CHAPTER III

MISCELLANEOUS METRICAL POETRY BEFORE OR CONTEMPORARY WITH CHAUCER—GOWER

Robert of Brunne—His metrical jumble—Lyric: MS. Harl. 2253—Analysis of its metres—*Alison*—The Cuckoo Song, *note*—Lesson of these—Especially as to Equivalence and Foot-division—The Percy Society "Religious Poems"—William of Shoreham—Wright's "Political Songs"—The *Cursor Mundi*—Minor poems of the Vernon MS.—"The Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil"—"The Castle of Love"—Hampole—Minot—Gower—His octosyllabics—His other verse—His general quality.

THE very large body of metrical verse which we find in the fourteenth century, and which culminates in the work of Gower, just as the alliterative section does in that of Langland, presents no new problems of much importance, unless it be that of the rise of the decasyllabic couplet. But, abundant as it is, few specimens of it are quite beneath notice as examples of the spread, combination, and varying of true English prosody.

Robert of Brunne.

Very early in the century the work of Robert of Gloucester is continued, after an interesting fashion, by his Christian-namesake, Robert Manning or Robert of Brunne. The best known and best work of this writer, the curious sacred miscellany of *Handling Sin*,[1] is in octosyllables, very fairly regular, though occasionally concentrating themselves as low as to a pretty exact hexasyllabic couplet. But his English translation[2] of the

[1] E.E.T.S., ed. Furnivall, 1901-3. The dating at the beginning of

> That tyme
> That I began thys *English* rhyme

is interesting.

[2] Ed. Hearne, Oxford, 1725; London, 1810.

French chronicle of Peter of Langtoft, with additions of his own, has greater metrical interest. The French original was written in the then regular metre of the *chansons de gestes* or family-romances, the Alexandrine, mono-rhymed in batches or stanzas of great but irregular length. Manning seems to have been afraid to translate these long lines into the octosyllabic couplets, which he understood fairly well, and which he actually employs in his own Prologues: and he tells us, in the first of these, that if he had made it in *ryme couwee*, or in *strangere*, or in *interlace*, or in *baston*,[1] many would not have understood it. He therefore attempts to follow Robert of Gloucester in the use of the long swinging line; but he makes a great mess of it. Those who are contented with four or some other number of accents *pour tout potage métrique*, may, for aught I know, be able to find them in his metre. Counting in their fashion, I should myself say that it was a jumble of anything from four to seven, with hardly any, and no constant, rhythm. Regarded as a sort of blind tentative at metre, it is much more interesting, because, like Layamon a hundred years earlier, it gives us all sorts of half-finished and probably not even half-designed forms —Ovidian rough drafts—as resultants of his metrical unskilfulness, and of the various things that were haunting his ear. Sometimes a fourteener of the Robert of Gloucester type emerges[2]; not at all uncommonly Alexandrines[3] like the original. But what is most interesting is the constant settling down and contraction of the verse to

His metrical jumble.

[1] For *couwee* see note, p. 93; *strangere* is uncertain; *interlace* is obvious; *baston* (see *Rel. Ant.* ii. 174) is a six-lined stanza as follows. It consists of four long and two short lines:—

> Hail be ye potters with yur bole-ax,
> Fair beth yur barmhatres, yolow beth your fax,
> Ye stondith at the sthamil, brod ferlich bernes,
> Fleiis yow folowithe, ye swolowith ynow.
> The best clark of all this tun
> Craftfullich makid this *bastun*.

But some hold that *bastun* here means simply "stave."

[2] Bot Athelstan the maistrie wan and did tham mercie crie.—P. 28.

[3] And somewhat of that tree, they bond untille his handes.—P. 22.

decasyllables,[1] and even to something that is almost, if not altogether, a decasyllabic couplet.[2] Hardly less but still less important is Robert's management of rhyme. It is clumsy too, but it has one point of great interest. He aims at and, after a fashion, achieves couplet-rhyme, sometimes only by keeping up the old Anglo-Saxon practice of declining proper names ("ageyn the king Magn*um*") as they would be declined in Latin. But every now and then he seems to have tried to emulate the continuous mono-rhyme of his original, and hard as this is in English, he sometimes manages, what with rhyme and what with assonance, to jingle after a fashion for a dozen or even a score lines.

The actual poetical interest in Manning is almost nothing at all; and the metrical interest, though not small, is of a purely technical kind. But the poetical interest is at the highest which the period can afford, and the metrical interest is that, not of blind and defeated groping, but of artistic and graceful accomplishment, in a collection of lyrical poems (earlier, and perhaps a good deal earlier, than at least the completion of Manning's work), which has been the delight of all poetically given readers of Middle English since Thomas Wright published it more than sixty years ago.[3]

Lyric—MS. Harl. 2253.

The most superficial reader must be struck with the singular contrast which these pieces present, not merely to the rough and inartistic experiments of Manning, but to much else of their time and even later. And it is more than a coincidence that the same MS. contains both French and English lyrics. Hardly the most childish national vanity requires to be told that the two juxtapositions, taken together, make the fact that English was still at school to French as certain from the merely literary point of view as it is reasonable from the political. The Norman princes, in the strict sense, were not likely

[1] The bisshop of his gift holdes his fe.—P. 29.

[2] Wharfor the barons granted him ilkone,
Knoute to be corowned, and haf it alone.—P. 49.

[3] *Specimens of Lyric Poetry*, London (Percy Society), 1842.

to exercise, or to see exercised, much influence of the kind. At the time of the Conquest the poetical literature of France was certainly not far developed; nor were the districts with which England was most closely connected those to show this development earliest. The Angevins, both chronologically, topically, and perhaps by temperament (for to say *leur grand'mère était sirène*, is no idle conceit), were in better case; and, as it happened, both the greatest of them, Henry II., and the least, Henry III., married princesses from Provence, while Richard Cœur de Lion was himself a troubadour.

The very first (French) poem is in the *Tristrem* metre with the odd lines lengthened, the second in short lines rhymed in regular blocks of four and three, as well as in couplet and alternately. There can be no doubt at all that some, if not all, of the authors wrote French and English indifferently—that all of them read the one language just as easily as the other—and ear and eye in such a case must have simply driven tongue and pen to emulate this new and charming music in their mother-tongue.

Analysis of its metres.

The first English poem (IV.)[1] has eleven-lined stanzas belonging to the general family of "wheel" arrangements, which is so common in the French and Provençal lyric, and rhymed *abababababcbc*. The *a* and *b* lines are octosyllables of the usual English free type, sometimes reduced to seven by a monosyllabic foot at the beginning, sometimes extended to nine by a trisyllabic foot, in any place almost, but quite rhythmically regular. The *c*'s are of six syllables only. In this and some others, it should be said, there is much alliteration, but the scansion is

[1] Mid|del-erd | for mon | wes mad,
un-mih|ti aren | is mes|te mede;
This he|dy hath | on hon|de y-had,
that he|vene hem | is hest | to hede:
Icherde | a bliss|e budel | us bad,
the dre|ri dom|es-dai | to drede,
Of sun|ful sauh|ting sone | be sad,
that der|ne doth | this der|ne dede;
thah he | ben der|ne done,
This wrake|ful wer|kes un|der wede
in so|ule so | teleth sone.
Wright, *op. cit.* p. 22.

It may be useful to compare this with the *Pearl* stanza.

quite metrical. The next[1] is in a stanza far less suited to the genius of the language, and in fact certain to be disused rather sooner than later, yet still very interesting as an experiment in the great kind which was to yield, in this very language, the most perfect example of stanza to be found anywhere—the Spenserian *novena*. It has, moreover, the further interest of combining the alliterated line (rough alliterated anapæstic dimeters rather shortened than lengthened), with the attempt, for the greater part of it, at mono-rhymed arrangement. Eight lines of this kind, rhyming together, lead up to a couplet of the same construction, but on a fresh rhyme. The effect, as might be expected, is grotesque enough, but that does not matter to us in the very least.

Alison.

There is nothing grotesque about the next,[2] the famous *Alison*, the prettiest thing (with one possible exception among its own companions) to be found in English literature up to its own time and for generations afterwards. This combines the elaborate wheel-stanza with the refrain system in a form not yet seen. The whole scheme is 868688868886, *ababbbbcdddc*, the last four lines forming the identical refrain in every stanza. The *b* lines are a little irregular, expanding sometimes to the full eight

[1] Ichot a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht,
Ase saphyr in selver semly on syht,
Ase jaspe the gentil that lemeth with lyht,
Ase gernet in golde, ant ruby wel ryht,
Ase onycle he ys on y-holden on hyht,
As diamaunde the dere in day when he is dyht,
He is coral y-cud with cayser ant knyht,
Ase emeraude a-morewen this may haveth myht.
The myht of the margarite haveth this may mere,
For charbocle ich hire ches bi chyn ant by chere.
Ibid. p. 25.

[2] Bytuen|e Mershe | ant A|veril
when spray | bigin|neth to springe,
The lut|el fou|l hath | hire wyl
on hy|re lud | to synge;
Ich lib|be in love-|longinge
For sem | lokest | of al|le thynge,
He may | me blis|se bringe,
icham | in hire | baundoun.
An hen|dy hap | ichab|be y-hent,
Ichot | from hevene | it is | me sent,
From alle | wymmen | mi love | is lent
ant lyht | on A|lysoun.
Ibid. p. 27.

syllables, and all are more or less freely equivalenced. The whole gives a quite charming effect—elaborate, without being laboured, and flowing, without looseness.

In the piece that follows (No. VII.),[1] a ten-line stanza of sixes is arranged on the rhyme system *aabaabbaab*. It is less effective, as is also VIII.,[2] set in twelves of eight eights and four sixes rhymed *abababababcdcd*, a certain amount of assonance being admitted in the last quatrain. IX. is in Romance twelves. X. is curious—in an eight-line stanza of alternate rhyme, with lines of a very uncertain basis, varying from double to triple time, as if the writer were aiming at the well-known Shenstonish anapæstic of three feet, but with constant double rhymes and almost equally constant lapses into different rhythm. It has the *ballade* "envoy" of four lines,[3] and an entirely unaccounted-for thing of the same kind after the first stanza.

[1] With lon|gyng y | am lad,
On mol|de I wax|e mad,
a maid|e mar|reth me;
Y grede, | y grone, | un-glad,
For sel|den y | am sad
that sem|ly for | te se;
Levedi, | thou rew|e me,
To rou|the thou havest | me rad;
Be bote | of that | y bad,
My lyf | is long | on the.

Ibid. p. 29.

[2] Weping | haveth | myn won|ges wet,
for wik|ked werk | ant wone | of wyt;
Unblithe|y be | til y | ha bet,
bruches | broken | ase | bok byt.
Of leve | dis love | that y | ha let,
that lem|eth al | with luef|ly lyt,
Ofte | in song | y have | hem set,
that is | unsem|ly ther | hit syt;
Hit syt | ant se|meth noht,
ther hit | ys seid | in song,
That y | have of | hem wroht,
y-wis | hit is | al wrong.

Ibid. p. 30.

[3] In a fryht as y con fare fremede,
y founde a wel feyr fenge to fere;
Heo glystnede ase gold when hit glemede,
nes ner gome so gladly on gere
Y wolde wyte in world who hire kenede,
this burde bryht, yef hire wil were;
Heo me bed go my gates, lest hire gremede,
ne kepte heo non henyng here.

These oddities might be evened by dividing the whole into *twelves*. XI. is the first borrowing in English, from Provençal (?), of the world-renowned "Burns-metre" 888484, *aaabab*, with a certain vacillation in the fourth line (and elsewhere) between four and six syllables.[1] It may be accident that the last stanza has only two instead of three initial eights. XII. to XV. are Romance, or shortened, twelves once more, XIII.—

Lenten ys come with love to toune—

being one of the best and best-known of the whole. With this and *Alison* the pearls of the collection are completed by XVI., couched in an eight-lined stanza, 88868886, with a refrain of the most charmingly irregular beauty[2]—the best early example of this most attractive poetical device. XVII. is French; XVIII. uses mono-rhymed octosyllabic quatrains; XIX., one of the not uncommon irregular arrangements of the Romance sixes; XX. is new—in quintets composed of a triplet and a couplet;[3] XXI. in

"Y-here thou me nou, hendest in helde,
navy the none harmes to hethe;
Casten y wol the from cares ant kelde,
comeliche y wol the nou clethe."
"Clothes y have forte caste,
such as y may weore with wynne;
Betere is were thunne boute laste,
then syde robes ant synke into synne.
Have ye or wyl, ye waxeth unwraste,
afterward or thonke be thynne;
Betre is make forewardes faste,
then afterward to mene ant mynne."
Ibid. pp. 36, 37.

[1] A wayle whyt as whalles bon,
A grein in golde that godly shon,
A tortle that min herte is on,
in tounes trewe;
Hire gladshipe nes never gon,
whil y may glewe.—*Ibid.* p. 38.

[2] Blow, northerne wynd,
Sent thou me my suetyng.
Blow, northerne wynd, blou, blou, blou!—*Ibid.* p. 51.

[3] Wynter wakeneth al my care,
Nou this leves waxeth bare,
Ofte y sike ant mourne sare,
When hit cometh in my thoht
Of this worldes joie, hou hit goth al to noht.
Ibid. p. 60.

sixes throughout, arranged in ten-line stanzas rhymed *ababccbddb*;[1] XXII., French; XXIII., a false Macaronic of Latin, French, and English mixed; and XXIV., French. XXV., the first English version of *Jesu dulcis memoria*, keeps the original metre; XXVI., French; XXVII., Romance sixes; XXVIII.-XXX., varieties of 6+4 as XXI. But XXXI.-XXXIII. give us Robert of Gloucester "swingers" in mono-rhymed quartet; XXXIV. is in six-lined stanzas of 888686, *aaabcb*; XXXV., in sixes, alternately French and English; XXXVI., eight-lined stanzas—eights with *ab* rhyme; XXXVII., Romance sixes; XXXVIII., French; XXXIX., like X., but more even. XL.[2] and XLII., which have

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Note (as always at this time carefully) the *decasyllabic* last line. There are only three stanzas, and the last lines of the other two—

Alle we shule deye, thath us like ylle

and

For y not whider y shal, ne hou longe her duelle

are very irregular.

[1] This is pretty enough to be given:—

When y se blosmes springe,
ant here soules song;
A suete love-longynge
myn herte thourh out stong,
Al for a love newe,
That is so suete ant trewe,
that gladieth al my song;
Ich wot al myd i-wisse
My joie ant eke my blisse
on him is al y-long.
Ibid. p. 61.

This, it will be seen, is a combination of shortened Romance six and ballad quatrain in reverse order. The actual order, in full-length lines as in XXX., occurs and persists, forming the beginning of Montgomerie's quatorzain long afterwards.

[2] Lutel wot hit anymon,
how love hym haveth y-bounde,
That for us othe rode ron,
ant bohte us with is wounde.
The love of him us haveth y-maked sounde,
Ant y-cast the grimly gost to grounde;
Ever ant oo, nyht ant day, he haveth us in is thohte,
He nul nout leose that he so deore bohte.
Ibid. p. 111.

XLIII. begins with the same line, but deals with earthly love. These sacred and profane duplicates are common.

much in common, give us a new scheme, not quite accomplished, but very promising. An alternately rhymed eight-six quatrain leads to a couplet, which at least aims at being decasyllabic, and this is capped by another refrain-couplet of the "swinging" type, with which it is obviously waiting to be rhymed.[1]

Lesson of these.

The lesson of all these is, I think, or should surely be, unmistakable. Here, not much more, *if* more, than a century after the first extensive, but scattered, signs of the imprint of the mould in Layamon, we find the same mould, but in sharper and incomparably more varied outline, applied systematically to English verse. And we find that verse taking it with a docility which is only less wonderful than the unconquerable independence and idiosyncratic quality which is simultaneously displayed. Some of the patterns equal in complexity, and, as patterns, in rigidity, the most accomplished forms of classical prosody, the Alcaic or the still larger choric strophe. Some are very simple, but equally rigid. All come, more or less, from or through a language in which,

The Cuckoo Song.

[1] In connection with these pieces should be noted those on p. 86, and (by careful students) the "Poetical Scraps" in *Rel. Ant.* ii. 119-121. Here too we shall best give the famous Cuckoo Song. The MS. (Harl. 978) has been dated at the middle of the thirteenth century, or earlier, and it has been even rather wildly spoken of as the first English song with *or without* music. Its rhythmical accomplishment—remarkable as are the premonitory notes of this that we have heard as far back as the *Bestiary*—seems to me rather too perfect for anything much short of the later thirteenth. But it is a charming thing, and may be left to its own charms, without dwelling on the questions whether it imitates the cuckoo's later as well as his earlier cry, what is its relation to its existing Latin duplicate, etc. :—

Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu !
Groweth sed and bloweth med,
And spring[e]th the wude nu.

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Llouth after calve cu :
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth.
Murie sing cuccu !

Cuccu ! cuccu ! wel singes thu cuccu
Ne swik thu naver nu.
Sing cuccu ! nu, sing cuccu !
Sing cuccu ! sing cuccu, nu !

I shall only add that if this is a "clear, natural music," as it has been called, it is a pretty artful one too, and shows the new rhythm, the new foot-division, the new rhyme, in no infantine stage of development.

from the want of *tonic* quality, there is no difficulty in accommodating itself to patterns of any complexity and rigidity ; but in which the very process of accommodation has ousted everything but the iambic base, or what Johnson long afterwards calls the "pure" syllabic sequence of accented or quasi-accented syllables, alternating with those unstressed — the actual arithmetical allowance of syllables being taken, always with more and more conscious stringency, as the be-all and the end-all of prosodic value. From the first there is—naturally and, indeed, inevitably—some tendency in English to accept this also; and we shall find the "preceptists," as soon as they appear, clinging to it. We could not have—we have not—any one much earlier than Orm ; and if Orm had had his way, the gyves of French prosody would have been upon us unto this hour.

Especially as to Equivalence

But Apollo and Pallas together thought of another thing for England. That the thing was done with theoretic or preceptist consciousness, in even a single instance before Spenser, may be not so much doubted as peremptorily and unhesitatingly denied. But it was done. In the great number of instances which we have been considering, and in the large supplement which will succeed, one single principle, undeviating at bottom through its infinite surface variety, shows itself—the determination to cling to the foot, not the syllable, as the prosodic integer, and the accompanying determination to allow, in the arrangement of feet, syllabic equivalence and substitution, just as it had been allowed in Greek and, to a smaller extent, in Latin. It is probable—to turn the probability into fact by an actual examination would be an interesting exercitation, but out of our proper sphere—that every non-alliterative stanza which we have studied, and some at least of the alliterative, have exact precedents in Northern French, or in Provençal, or in both. It is certain that most have. But when we turn to these precedents we shall find not merely fixed rhymes and numbers of lines, but a fixed internal constitution of lines likewise (accidents and errors excepted) on an

absolutely syllabic basis. In the vast majority of the English exponents we shall find that the rhyme and the line-number are kept, but that the line constitution is altered on the scheme just given.

and Foot-division.

It can hardly be necessary to repeat what has been said more than once on the really, if not at first sight, irreconcilable difference between this view and that of those who look solely at accent, with or without an addition of "section." The section and the foot (or foot-group) will sometimes, though by no means very often, coincide; the accent-division will in appearance sometimes show results not strikingly different, to the novice, from that of the foot-division. But the difference *is* real, vital, irreconcilable, and the contention of this book is that, historically and logically, the foot-division will give a coherent, a consistent, and a continuous explanation of English metrical prosody, while the accent-division will not.

The Percy Society "Religious Poems."

It is interesting to go through, after these, another batch of lyric examples, the selection of "Religious Songs" which Wright published in another Percy Society volume with *The Owl and the Nightingale*.[1] They are probably—both from the date of the MS. and from the complexion of the language—slightly older than those which we have already surveyed; but this is not quite certain, and at any rate they belong to the same general class—that of the lyric in elaborate stanza. If they are older they strengthen our case; if they are not, they certainly do not weaken it. The first is in a ten-line stanza of double rhymes, arranged in a rather curious order, *ababbaabab*.[2] The general constitution of the line

[1] London, 1843.

[2] Nis non | so strong | ne sterch | ne kene,
That mai | ago | deathes wi|ther blench:
Yung and olde, brihet and schene,
Alle he riveth in one strench.
Fox and ferlich is his wrenh,
Ne mai no mon thar-to yeines,
Weilawei! threting ne bene,
Mede, liste, ne leches drench.
Mon, let sunne and lustes thine;
Wel thu do and wel thu thench.
P. 63.

argues an early origin; for the writer seems not to have made up his mind which to adopt of the two great divisions, three feet and four feet, hexasyllable and octosyllable, that, as we have seen, fought a rather unequal fight for English in the latter part of the thirteenth century. There are examples of complete iambic dimeter; but they are in the minority, and they do not appear at any fixed or corresponding point of the stanza. And further, there is the occurrence of identical rhyme-schemes in successive stanzas—another proof of earliness, and a certain sign, either that the writer is aiming at a still stiffer uniformity which he cannot quite accomplish, or that he has stumbled into an unintended repetition the inartistic effect of which he has not realised.

The second[1] is also a *dizain* with "Romance" beginning, but the lines gravitating rather to the six- than to the eight-syllable norm, and the final one is (with some substitution) of two instead of three feet, in due proportion. The rhymes are also differently arranged, *ababaababa*. This makes a very good *carillon*, with possibilities of still better gifts (*e.g.* the insertion of a very strong middle pause in line six, the "hinge" of the stanza) which the writer only dimly sees.[2] Number III. is an isolated

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The rhymes are in 1 and 2 *-ench* and *-ene*; in 3 *-o* and *-ede*; in 4 *-our* and *-eo*; in 5 *-ikedh* and *-o*. The shortest line is—

Him stil|lich to | for-do;

the longest—

Weilawei! deth the schal adun throwe.

[1] On hir|e is al | mi lif | i-long,
Of hwam | ich wu | le singe,
And heri|en hi|re, that | among
Heo gon | us bo|te bringe,
Of hel|le pi|ne that | is strong
Heo broh|te us blis|se that | is long,
Al thurh | hire chil|deringe.
Ich bid|de hire one | mi song,
Heo yeove | us god | endinge,
Thah we | don wrong.

P. 65.

[2] He is near it in stanza 2—

Heo broghte woht, thu broghtest right.

octave on Wit and Will in two rhymes alternately — rather rough octosyllables, with a good deal of the staccato effect noticeable in the proverb canto-headings of *King Alexander*. IV.,[1] though printed in halves by Wright, is really shortish Robert of Gloucester "swingers" mono-rhymed in quatrains—the obvious but much less effective English equivalent of the admirable *Meum est propositum in taberna mori* metre of contemporary Latin; and V. is the same. VI. is a merely rhythmed Proverb of Bede, no doubt of great age, but with what it would be not so proper to call traces as embryos of rhyme. VII. is much more interesting, for though of the same build for a time, it settles down as possibly the first appearance in English of "The Queen was in her parlour." But at one point of the poem, the writer, either by mere accident, or feeling the necessity (since he is paraphrasing the account of the Passion in the Creed) to adopt a more solemn measure, shifts for eight lines into the octosyllabic couplet.[2]

William of Shoreham.

The poems of William of Shoreham[3] are more remarkable for the adjustment of elaborate metres to abstruse theological subjects than for any great merit of verse; but they should not be omitted. William's favourite is

[1] Hwenne ich thenche of domes-dai,
ful sore ime adrede.
Ther schal after his
euch mon fongen mede.
Ich habbe Crist agult
widh thoghtes and widh dede.
Laverd Crist, Godes sone,
wat is me to rede?

[2] Harknied, alle gode men,
and stille sitteth adun,
And ich eou wule tellen
a lutel sermun.

This is *Gamelyn* already. At what precise time, and in what precise way, the "fourteener" takes this turn is a question which different ears seem to answer differently. The octosyllabic insertion runs thus :—

He made him into helle falle,
And efter him his children alle,
etc.

[3] Ed. Wright, Percy Society, London, 1849.

a sort of shortened *Tristrem* stanza of seven lines,[1] with bob 8686286, rhymed or assonanced *oaoabob*. But a moment's thought will show that it is really a quatrain with three fourteeners, and a bob which forms the third line and makes the rhyme-scheme, even while it accentuates the eccentricity of the vehicle. Shoreham also adopts alternately rhymed eights and sixes of a rough kind, and the regular Romance sixain, as well as the very effective one of 888686 rhymed *aaabab*.

Wright's "Political Songs."

The Camden Society "Political Songs," which were among the earliest results (1839) of the industry of Wright, are of special interest for more reasons than one. In the first place, it is quite evident that they must show us, not merely what metre could be tolerated by the popular ear, but what positively pleased it. For the political verse-smith does not risk unpopularity of form. In the second place, as they were at first written in French or Latin, and only after a time in English, we should expect them to bear strong marks of the prosody of these other languages; and they do. Thirdly, as nothing sinks into memory more than satirical poetry of this kind, we should expect (and we find) that they will either give early indication of, or exercise great influence upon, the prosody of the future.

The very first piece[2] rewards us richly. The "Song against the King of Almaine" (which should be as old as the Battle of Lewes, 1264) is in stanzas of seven lines. The last two of these are a constant refrain in trochaic rhythm, with one internal rhyme and a sort of attempt at

[1] The matyre of this sacrement
Hys ryght the oylle allone;
And wanne the bisschop blesseth hyt
Baume therwith megth he none
Ther-inne,
For baume tokneth lyve's loos
Oyle mercy to wynne.

[2] Sitteth alle stille ant | herkneth to me:
The Kyn of Alemaigne, | bi mi leauté,
Thritti thousent pound | askede he
For te make the pees | in the countré,
ant so | he du | de more.
Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
trichen shalt thou never more.—P. 69.

The 5th line changes after the 1st stanza.

another. The antepenultimate is a refrain "bob" of three feet, the last word being "Wyndesore" always, with varying others; and the rest, or substance of the stanza, consists of a mono-rhymed quatrain, the materials of which are simply invaluable. For while they are evidently in main intention the skipping nondescripts of "The Queen was in her parlour," they often settle into anapæsts of the most unimpeachable structure, thereby giving yet another testimony to the probable origin, or at least the circumstances, which helped to naturalise this great staple of poetry in England. One may be very glad that the Barons' triumph did not last; but for this result of it, while it did last, one may be truly thankful. For the piece, besides the prosodic attractions already enumerated, has another on which it would be wrong to lay too much stress, but which certainly cannot be altogether neglected when we compare it with the next, the "Song of the Husbandman."[1] The skit on Richard of Cornwall has alliteration in it, as nearly all natural English poetry has, but there is no very great amount thereof, and it is quite evident that the writer is not aiming at it, in the very least, as a principle of his verse. In the "Song of the Husbandman," perhaps fifty years later, this aim is quite unmistakable. There is rhyme alternate on two rhymes only, arranged in an octave first and then a quatrain by turns. But the individual line is of the usual alliterative type, only cadenced for singing. This evidence in the great case of Persistence *v.* Resurrection is invaluable. And each piece that follows tells of the revival and helps

[1] Ich herde men upo mold make muche mon,
Hou he beth i-tened of here tilyynge,
God yeres and corn bothe beth a-gon,
Ne kepeth here no sawe ne no song syng.
"Now we mote worche, nis ther non other won,
Mai ich no lengore lyve with my lesinge;
Yet ther is a bitterore bid to the bon,
For ever the furthe peni mot to the kynge.

Thus we carpeth for the kyng, and carieth ful colde,
And weneth for te kevere, and ever buth a-cast;
Whose hath eny god, hopeth he nout to holde,
Bote ever the levest we leoseth a-last."

P. 149.

to date it for us at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The very uncomplimentary "Against the Pride of Ladies" is in a quaint seven-lined stanza[1] with bob and wheel rhymed *aaaabbb*, the *aaaa* being common alliterated lines, the *b* "bob" a single foot, and the other two a very irregular couplet hovering round three feet as a norm. Another on the "Church Courts" is very elaborate.[2] The full stanza has no less than eighteen lines, and consists of a main body *aabccbddbeeb*, where the *b* lines are three feet and the others alliterative, and a tail *ffgggf*, two *f*'s and the *g*'s being sixes, the last *f* a four. The English poem on the Battle of Courtrai has a very popular ding-dong arrangement, not showing much alliteration, but made of two rough triplets of "Queen-in-parlour" lines, each mono-rhymed with a fourth and eighth in sixes rhymed together.[3] A "Song on the

[1] Lord that lenest us lyf, and lokest uch an lede,
For te cocke with knyf nast thou none nede;
Both wepmon ant wyf sore mowe drede,
Lest thou be sturne with strif, for bone that thou bede,
in wunne
That monkun[n]e
Shulde shilde hem from sunne.
P. 153.

[2] Ne mai no lewed lued libben in londe,
Be he never in hyrt so haver of honde,
So lerede us bi-ledes;
Yef ich on molde mote with a mai,
Y shal falle hem byfore ant lurnen huere lay,
Ant rewen alle huere redes.
Ah bote y be the furme day on folde hem by-fore,
Ne shal y nout so skere scapen of huere score;
So grimly he on me gredes,
That y ne mot me lede ther with mi lawe,
On alle maner othes that heo me wulleth awe,
Heore boc ase un-bredes.
Heo wendeth bokes un-brad,
Ant maketh men a moneth a-mad;
Of scathe y wol me skere,
Ant fleo from my fere;
Ne rohte he whet it were,
Boten heo hit had.
Pp. 155-156.

[3] Lustneth, lordinges, bothe yonge ant olde,
Of the Freynsshe-men that were so proude ant bolde,
Hou the Flemmysshe-men bohten hem ant solde
Upon a Wednesday;

Times" (p. 195 *sq.*) is in alternate rhymed eights, sinking irregularly to "common measure." The long and not very chivalrous ballad on the execution of Sir Simon Fraser has the now familiar alternative quatrain with a bob and wheel *abba*, the bob varying between one foot and two, and the other three lines being mostly of three feet each. A different note, but a very familiar one, is struck in the short-lined song "Against Retainers," which, however, there is no reason for regarding as anything but the usual quatrain of alliterated lines broken up and rhymed.[1] But the "Dirge on the Death of Edward I.," though with a good deal of alliteration, is in regular eights, arranged in an octave by ordering the rhymes *ababbcbc*. We return to extremely elaborate arrangements in the singularly grave and earnest poem on his worthless successor's breach of the Great Charter. Part of this is in French, and part of the English part in Romance sixes, but the rest is in these sixes "tailed" in a very curious fashion,[2] which citation will show better than any analysis.

Betere hem were at home in huere londe,
Then for te seche Flemmysshe by the see stronde,
Wharethourh moni Frenshe wyf wryngeth hire honde,
Ant singeth, weylaway !

Pp. 187-188.

[1] Of ribaudz y ryme
Ant rede o mi rolle,
Of gedelynges, gromes,
Of Colyn ant of Colle,
Harlotes, hors-knaves,
Bi pate ant by polle ;
To devel ich hem to-lyvre
Ant take to tolle !

P. 237.

[2] The ferste seide, "I understonde
Ne may no king wel ben in londe,
Under God Almihte,
But he cunne himself rede,
Hou he shal in londe lede
Everi man wid rihte.
For might is riht,
Liht is night,
And fiht is fliht.
For miht is riht, the lond is laweles ;
For niht is liht, the lond is loreles ;
For fiht is fliht, the lond is nameles."

P. 254.

Lastly, the poem, already several times printed, on the "Times of Edward II." is in long alliterated quatrain, with a single foot bob and another full line rhymed to this.

The *Cursor Mundi.*

While these elaborate stanza-arrangements were being practised, the old octosyllabic couplet was, even outside Romance, by no means neglected. It tended for a time, beyond all doubt, to approximate more and more to the syllabic or *Owl-and-Nightingale* uniformity, as was natural, because, as has been repeatedly pointed out, the more men deliberately studied French originals, the more were they likely to be beguiled by the characteristics of those originals which did not, as well as by those which did, necessarily belong to English. But the *Genesis-and-Exodus* freedom was not left without representatives even in continuous couplet, while, as we have already shown, it constantly if irregularly maintained itself in more complicated arrangements. The chief example in the couplet itself is probably that already mentioned, the interesting poem of *The Vox and the Wolf.* We certainly cannot take a better example of the more regular form, from the mighty mass of non-romantic material which exists, than the bulk, *ingens* but by no means *horrendum* or *informe*, of the *Cursor Mundi.* Even here there is frequent monosyllabic beginning, and sometimes, if not very often, a trisyllabic foot; for instance, l. 3755 Göttingen version.[1] But for the most part the syllabic regularity is very great, and in long stretches of lines you shall find not a single violation of it.

Minor poems of the Vernon MS.

Before coming to individual writers like Minot (and the more nebulous but more important Hampole), it may be well to look through the great miscellany of the Vernon MS. as far as it has been yet printed, to see if we can add any useful studies. The most effective and by far the most useful way of treating so large a mass will be, as usual, to analyse right through, with examples at foot where they are required.

[1] And es|thar, fa|der, nan oth|er wan.—E.E.T.S. ed. ii. 223.

There are more in some of the other versions, and in all the initial monosyllabic foot is common enough.

I. is a species of Gospel history in mono-rhymed quatrains of eights. II., a paraphrase of the *Miserere* in alternate rhymed octaves of the same. III., ditto. IV., couplets of eights partly continuous, partly interlarded with a couplet refrain. V., an extremely effective double octave, showing the command of metrical rhythm which had been reached (*before* 1380) as well as almost anything we have met. The first octave is of continuous eights, *oaoaoaoa* ; the second 86868686, rhymed *babaoaoa*. The continuous *a* rhyme sets the music marvellously, and the adjustment of dissyllabic, monosyllabic, and trisyllabic feet in the second part is consummate. There is a *possible* alternative of scanning the even lines as sixes all through, which almost improves it ; and altogether it is a jewel.[1] VI., alliterative mono-rhymed quatrains. VII. consists of Romance sixes, powerfully shortened in the couplets into frequent monosyllabic feet. VIII. is a cunning arrangement which may look like a muddle, but is very much the reverse. The lines are eights throughout, with a very little substitution ; the rhyme-system is *abababababcbcbcbcbcb*. The *b* rhymes, as in the former case, are all in *e*, to provide for the constant recurrence of

[1] Jhe|su Crist, | my lem|mon swete,
That digh|edest on | the Ro|de-tre,
With al | my miht | I the | be-seche,
ffor | thi woun|des two | and three,
That al|so fas|te mot | thi love
In to | myn her|te fic|ched be
As was | the spere | in to thin herte
Whon thou | soffre|dest deth | for me.
Jhesus | that digh|edest on | the Rode
ffor | the love | of me
And bouh|test me | with | thi blode,
Thou | have mer|ci of me : |
What | me let|teth of e|ny thing
ffor | to love | the,
Beo hit | me lef | beo hit | me loth,
Thow do | hit a-wey | from me, AMEN.

Or

2. That dighed|est on the | Rode-tre.
4. ffor thi woun|des two | and three.
6. In to myn | herte fic|ched be.
8. Whon thou soff|redest deth | for me.

Minor Poems of the Vernon MS., E.E.T.S. (1892), i. p. 22.

"me" necessary in a devotional poem; and it is not extravagant to call the total effect charming.[1] IX., Romance sixes. X., couplets of eights. XI., alliterative mono-rhymed quatrains; so also XII. XIII., couplets of eights. XIV., the same, every other line headed "Marie." XV., Romance sixes, as also XVI. and XVII., while XVIII. returns to octosyllabic couplets much curtailed. XIX., "The Hours of the Cross," adapts its Latin original very skilfully by means of a mono-rhymed alliterative quatrain, a bob of varying length, and, rhymed with it, a fifth alliterative line and a versicle or refrain couplet in eights, with some licence of extension in the second line. XX., the Middle English *Veni Creator*, is in alternate rhymed quatrains of eights, and therefore most interesting to compare with Cosin's and Dryden's famous standards. The alternate rhymes have not quite the dignity of the couplet, and there is perhaps no single phrase that approaches the unapproachable

> Anoint and cheer our soilèd face
> With the abundance of Thy grace

in the great Bishop of Durham's version, but that could

[1] I the honoure with al my miht
In fourme of Bred as I the se,
Lord, that in that ladi briht,
In Marie Mon bi-come for me.
Thi fflesch, thi blod is swete of siht,
Thi Sacrament honoured to be,
Of Bred and Wyn with word i-diht;
Almihti lord, I leeve in the.
I am sunful, as thou wel wost:
Jhesu, thou have merci of me;
Soffre thou nevere that I be lost
ffor whom thou dighedest uppon the tre,
Ac thorwh that ladi of Merci most
Mi soule thou bringe in blisse to the;
Repentaunce to-fore mi deth,
Schrif[t] and Hosul thou graunte me,
With ffadur and Sone and Holygost,
That Regneth God in Trinite. Amen.
P. 25.

I have given this in full, but without marking the foot-divisions, as a good excursive example in the infinite and delicate diversities lumped under the clumsy title-muddle of "four-accent" metre.

hardly be expected.[1] XXI., alternate eights of eights, and XXII., quatrains to match. XXIII., a version of the *Psalterium Mariae* of Albertus Magnus, is not very good and very rough ballad metre, the odd lines often shortened, as is XXIV., another of the same form, the original being attributed to Aquinas. The great length of both these pieces, and the probably supposed necessity of keeping to the divisions of the Latin, may account for their inferiority. XXV., a third *Ave Maria*, is in Romance sixes, and better, the same metre being followed in XXVI. and XXVII. XXVIII. is in alternate rhymed eights. The batch (remnant of a much larger one) of "Miracles of Our Lady" which fills XXIX. is, as we should expect, for the most part in the usual octosyllabic couplet, but diverges into the alternate rhymed quatrain and the alliterative couplet or quatrain, with one or two excursions. The same metres prevail in four or five long poems that follow; but two others, which complete the first volume in the E.E.T.S. edition, fall into quite a different class and require separate treatment. These are "The Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil (XXXVII.) and "The Castle of Love" (XXXVIII.). They present certain points of resemblance, as well as others of contrast, with Hampole's famous *Prick of Conscience*, which may be taken with them.

"The Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil."

The most interesting, though by far the least known of the three, is "The Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil," which, metrically speaking, is an Ingoldsby Legend of the fourteenth century. No other poem shows the ease with which the stricter metre and the looser rhythm had come to keep house together in English, and

[1] Compare also Vernon, fourth stanza—

Lord, in ur wittes tend thi liht,
And in ur hertes thi love sende;
Ur bodi feblenesse thorwh thi miht
Strengthe hit evere with-outen ende.

and Dryden—

Refine and purge our earthy parts,
But oh! inflame and fire our hearts;
Our frailties help, our vice control,
Submit the senses to the soul.
Etc.

the satisfactory results of the *ménage*. The *Dispute* begins with eight lines of octosyllabic couplet, showing no liberty except that of the anacrusis, or initial monosyllabic foot. But, the story once begun, it launches suddenly into Robert-of-Gloucester fourteeners or ballad-metre for a distich, contracting itself into what is almost a decasyllabic couplet forthwith. Nay, to cover the whole range of standard foot-arrangement at once, there is even a pretty complete Alexandrine here and there, as at line 16. And henceforward the versifier fingers this range from sixes to fourteeners without, it may be allowed, very much poetical power, but with astonishing ease and technical skill. His lines are never unscannable; they never betray the least sign of that metrical inability and trouble which is so evident a hundred years earlier, and which reappears less and more than a hundred years later. He has got his tuning-fork adjusted, and his ear and tongue and hand follow it, and each other, through the most apparently eccentric windings without any difficulty at all.[1] The system of the foot—iambic as a rule, but with

[1] Swithe muche neode hit is
That uche mon be war and wys
To kepe him from the fendes lore—
ffor he fondeth euer-more.
And that we mowen alle I-witen
As hit is in the Bok I-writen,
I wol ow telle, as I con,
How the fend tempteth a Mon.—
Hit was uppon an haly-day: In an heigh feste of the yere;
Muche folk was to churche gon: Godes word for to here;
The Preost of the chirche undude the gospel
And lerede his parischens, as he couthe wel,
And bad hem openly nyme good yeme
Hou thei scholden god wel queme
And schenden the foule fend of helle,
That fondeth euere iliche monnus soule to qwelle.
When the prest hedde I-spoken & don what he wolde,
The folk wente hamward, as right was thei scholde.
Ibid. i. p. 329, ll. 1-18.

Divided examples:—

1, 2. Swi|the muche neo|de hit is
That u|che mon | be war | and wys.

9, 10. Hit was | uppon | an ha|ly-day | : In an heigh | feste of | the yere;
Muche | folk was | to chur|che gon: Godes | word for | to here;

16. That fon|deth eu|ere ili|che mon|nus sou|le to qwelle.

23. The wik|ked fend | of hell|e ther | of hed|de onde.

equivalents from trisyllable to monosyllable permitted—is obviously quite at his mastery: he can mow this meadow in the most complicated swathes with perfect proportion and success.

'The Castle of Love.'

We have two English versions of Grostête's *Château d'Amour*, which are at least as interesting to compare from our present point of view as from any other. The first of these is couched in that form of octosyllabic couplet, with occasional extension to decasyllabic, which is so noticeable at this period, and of which we shall have more to say presently. It handles this mixture—if mixture it is to be called—freely enough, but does not go beyond it. The second version, however, attributed to a monk of Sawley, approximates much closer to the elaborate freedom of the *Dispute*, but with less variety and at the same time less sureness of touch. The writer begins with a block of rather roughly rhythmical eights, and changes from it to a similar block of tens,[1] which

[1] Specially to be noted. They occur *constantly*.

Who-so wele thinkes, wele may say,
ffor of gode thoghtes comes gode dedes ay.
God send us thoght to his plesyng,
In whos fre wil hynges all thyng.
He is god and lord of myghtes mast,
The fader and sone and haligast;
In godhed are thise persones thre,
And all are on god in trinite;
None is othir of thise persons thre,
Bot alle are on god and ay sal be.
Oure mede is to trowe this with stable thoght,
Al-be-hit that mannes skil proues it noght;
Bot when we sal se god clerly,
Than sal we knawe this witerly,

Of the begynnyng of the world

God in vj dayes made bothe erthe & heuen,
And, to make haliday, cessed at the seuen.
Heuen was occupid with angeles kynde,
Euermore on god for to haue thair mynde—
Bot many thorgh pride fel in to helle,
Thar sal thei all with-outen ende dwelle.
Bothe sunne and mone [mor] bright thai ware
Then seuenfold then thay now are,
And all erthli thing more vertuous,
Bi-for Adam thurgh synne was vicious;
And ilk a best sul[d] haue bowed to mannes will,
Had he neuer bi way of synne don none ill.
When god had the world so parfit made
That no partie of hit defaut hade,

extend themselves, in a still rough but distinct procession or telescopy, to twelves and fourteeners. And this system he pursues, seeming on the whole to prefer the longer lines to the shorter, and as a rule, though not universally, using them in blocks and not attempting the agile variety of the *Dispute*. It is no doubt just as well, for the man's ear was obviously not a very good one, and if he had attempted the full "Ingoldsby" legerdemain he would probably have made a very great mess of it. But he is quite as valuable a document for his time as if he had possessed the technique of Barham or of Banville.

But it is time to come, if only for a moment, to the most interesting single figure in English verse of the fourteenth century before Chaucer—a figure dim and legendary, no doubt, and with its actual literary work not so much difficult as impossible to authenticate, but both striking and stable in its shadowiness—Richard Rolle of Hampole.

Hampole.

The nearly ten thousand lines of the *Prick of Conscience*[1] display the lesser, but newer and in a sense more momentous, of the two extensions of the octosyllable that we have been surveying. Hampole never expatiates into

---

Then of erth he made Adam, of man age,
To his liknes in saule he was & his ymage.
Of a rib of Adam syde, when he lay slepand,
God may Eue, that sho to him suld ay be kepand.
Of on god made al man-kynde, for ilkon suld loue other
And non til other do wrong mor then til his brother.
What lyf myght mor be schewed to man in charite
Then in saule make him lik to the haly trinite,
Make him lord of al the world, ful of vertuez, & wise,
Make him eir of heuen-blis & sette him in paradis,
Thare he and all that come of him myght leue with-outen deyng,
If thay use the frut of lif & kepe wel godes biddyng.
Of all the trees of paradis bi goddis biddyng thei suld ete,
But the frut of the tre of wetyng of gode and ille thei suld lete ;
What tyme as thei ete of that, thai suld forfet thair heritage
& be oblischid to deth & helle-payne, thai & all thair lynage.
Bot, if thai had kepid wel all goddis biddyng,
Thai suld haue leued joyfully, & all thair ofspring,
Til thai had ben tan til heuen, to fille that fair place
That thurgh pride of lucifer & his feres voyde was ;
Thare thai suld haue had mor ioye than hert may thenk or tunge telle,
& neuer non of thair kynd suld haue suffride payn of helle.

Ibid. i. pp. 407-409, ll. 1-50.

[1] Ed. Morris, Philological Society, 1863.

the fourteener, and if there are any Alexandrines it must be more or less accidental; but he frequently[1] drops a decasyllabic couplet, and his individual lines not very seldom allow themselves hyper-catalexis to the same extent, while they simply swarm with equivalences.

But it is in the minor poems, attributed not so probably to Hampole himself as to his later disciples and successors, that the most astonishing examples of the completed combination of metre and "swing" exist. They may not be quite so early as most of the poems with which we are dealing; yet examples, certainly in the *Vernon*, with which we have dealt and shall deal, make this by no means impossible. The two most wonderful are the exquisite piece beginning—

> My treuest treasure so traitorly taken
> (Horstmann's *Hampole*, i. 72),

of which I have already remarked elsewhere[2] that it anticipates Mr. Swinburne's music five hundred years later; and the very valuable "*E. I. O.*" which, in its most perfect form, gives the full sway and swing of the *Nut Broune Maid* itself. But to these we may return when we come, in the next Book, to this last-named jewel, and to the complicated lyrics of the Mystery Plays.

Continuing the Vernon (E.E.T.S., Pt. 2), XXXIX. is in alternately rhymed octosyllabic quatrains, and XL. in mono-

[1] *E.g.*—

> He may | be li|kend and | he | es | llyke than
> Til bes|tes that | na sky|lle ne wit|te can.
> ll. 606, 607.
>
> The bu|ghes er | the ar|mes with | the handes,
> And the | legges | with the | fete | that standes.
> ll. 680, 681.
>
> For a gre|te clerk | says that | hight Ber|thelmewe
> That twa | worldes | er prin|cipally | to shewe.
> ll. 966, 967.

There are scores and perhaps hundreds of others. Perhaps I may as well here counter, once for all, an objection which may be made by some, that, according to their ideas, English was then pronounced in a way which will not admit of my scansions. They may be right or wrong as to their pronunciation—I have never seen any real evidence in their favour. But that the words have the δύναμις of mine, whether they have the momentary actuality or not, is a fact obvious and insuperable.

[2] *Short History of English Literature*, p. 76. I refer to *Itylus*.

rhymed ditto, as is XLI. XLII. is in octosyllabic staves on two alternate rhymes; XLIII. in similar octaves of sixes ending with one of eights. This later scheme reappears in XLIV., but with much uncertainty of arrangement, whether deliberate or not it is hard to say. The first stanza is rhymed *ababccdc*; in the others the even lines are mono-rhymed, while the odd ones are blank. But XLV. returns to the regular form of the stanza. XLVI. is in the sixteen-line stanza of mostly short lines, *aaab*, *cccb*, *dddb*, *eeeb*, which we have noted in Romance. XLVII. is in Romance twelves and XLVIII. in Romance sixes—"The Proverbs of Prophets," etc. XLIX. translates Latin first into French and then into English quatrains, sixains, or octaves, usually in octosyllables, but sometimes with an extra foot; and the same process is observed in "Little" and "Great" "Cato" (L.) (quaint things made up of Latin, French, and English), though the tendency here is rather to shorten than to lengthen the octosyllable.[1] LI. (the rather well-known *Stations of Rome*) is in octosyllabic couplet.

Two alliterative pieces follow: the later, the beautiful, well-known, and already noticed *Pistyl of Sweet Susane*, with its thirteen-lined arrangement of body, bob and wheel; the earlier, mainly in thirteen-line stanzas, rhymed like *Susane*, but the lengths different, the first and last a very odd creation[2] of no less than seventeen lines *aabaabaabaabcdddc*, 4444444444468886, but *compressible* into nine as below. LIV. is in couplets.

[1] The "Great Cato" man apologises punctiliously at the end.

> The merueyles of thise nakede vers
> Beoth maked bi two and two:
> The schortnesse of my luitel wit
> Dude me en-Ioynen hem so.
>
> Vernon, ii. p. 609, ll. 633-636.

[2] Oure ladi freo, on Rode treo, made hire mon:
Heo seid, "on the, the fruit of me, is wo bigon;
Mi fruit I seo, in blodi bleo, among his fon;
Serwe I seo, the veines fleo, from blodi bon.
Cros, thou dost no trouthe,
On a pillori my fruit to pinne.
He hath no spot of Adam sinne:
fflesch and veines nou fleo a-twinne;
Wherfore I rede of routhe."—*Ibid.* ii. p. 612, stanza 1.

(For metre cf. Tusser, p. 328.)

The thirty poems which make up number LV. are almost throughout written to refrains, and in stanzas mostly composed of eights, alternately rhymed, but arranged with slight differences; the *b* rhyme being very often caught up from the even to the odd lines in the second half of the verse. The few short poems from MS. Digby 86, which complete the second volume of the E.E.T.S. edition of the Vernon *Shorter Poems* give, I think, nothing new.

Minot. In Laurence Minot,[1] the one named (though hardly known) writer of the exact middle of the century, there is nothing very original either in matter or in form, but the latter shows an attempt to smooth out and regularise after a somewhat mechanical fashion. I. is in octaves of eights rhymed *abababb*. II.,

> Skotes | out of Ber|wik and of | Aberdene |
> At the | Bannokburn | war | ze to kene,

shows with what ease the old accented line settles to fairly regular anapæsts. III. is the familiar admixture of octosyllabic couplet and Romance six, both fairly if not perfectly regular. IV. repeats the anapæsts, keeping more alliteration than in the former instance; V. is in octaves of threes, rhymed like the eights of I.; to which VI. returns after a couplet prologue; and VII. follows suit. VIII. is a "Queen-in-the-parlour" kept short in this fashion:—

> Sir David the Bruse
> Was at dystance,
> When Edward the Baliolfe
> Rade with his lance,

a form which Minot liked well enough to keep it in IX. and X.[2] As he writes in a distinctly northern dialect, we may perhaps safely note in him that greater precision of stanza which will distinguish poets in Scots, and which is the complement of their tendency to alliterative scansion.

[1] Repeatedly edited from Ritson to Mr. Joseph Hall; some in Morris and Skeat.

[2] If any one likes, he may say that this is the *same* as II., and that both are only Robert of Gloucester and so *Poema Morale*. I have already referred to the Appendix for my view of the metamorphoses of the fourteener and its *chassé-croisé* with the anapæst.

Gower[1] requires much less notice than Chaucer, for the simple reason that, great as is the bulk of his work in English, it is, with trifling exceptions, all written in one metre, and that one of which we have said a great deal already. His French and Latin exercises, much more metrically various and complicated, do not here concern us, except that the ease with which he manages them shows the great effect which these two prosodies must have had on the trilingual generation of writers who had to do, at this momentous time, with the practical foundation—not of English prose and poetry, but—of modern English poetry and modern English prose. Gower.

Gower's management of his octosyllable, however, has quite interest enough in itself to occupy us for a page or two. In a certain sense, its age and its accomplishment being taken together, it is the capital example, in English, of the unequivalenced variety of the metre. It has less vigour and variety than Chaucer's, but runs much more easily; it seems to be written as much *con amore* as Chaucer's was written against the grain. It was, I have little doubt, directly in the eye and mind of Wither and Browne when they wrote in the early seventeenth century, and while it may have had direct influence, as well as through them, on Keats, in the admirable *Eve of St. Mark*, it certainly influenced directly, as well as through him and them, Mr. William Morris, the actual author of the greatest examples of it in English, taking bulk and merit together. It must therefore be worth a little examination. His octosyllabics.

The exceptions above noted—the decasyllabic *Supplication* of the Eighth Book and the short piece *In Praise of Peace*—show much the same general characteristics as the octosyllables, Dr. Schipper's discovery of roughness in them being only one of those instances which show how hardly a foreigner shall His other verse.

[1] Every student of English poetry must acknowledge the debt which we owe to Mr. G. C. Macaulay for at last providing us, in the Clarendon Press issue (4 vols. Oxford, 1899-1902), with a complete and trustworthy edition of an author whose piecemeal and slovenly presentation, up to our time, had been a positive scandal to English bookmaking. If here, as in relation to Chaucer, I take prosodic views rather different from Professor Macaulay's, I am all the more indebted to him for supplying a stable foundation to my own.

appreciate these things.[1] But their amount is too small to necessitate study.[2] In the octosyllable, the uncompromising adoption of the French, or syllabically uniform, system is the first thing noticeable. There may be a few exceptions, but they are very few, and as a rule Gower trusts to syncopation, or actual compounding of syllables, rather than to addition, while he also avoids the seven-syllable lines in which Chaucer revels. He does begin with a trochee —a proceeding which can give no pause or difficulty to any but very fanatics of "accent." Even Mr. Macaulay, whose description of Gower's versification as an adaptation of French syllabic to English accentual scansion I could not quite accept, justly says "this is not so much a displacement of the actual accent as a trochaic commencement, after the fashion which has established itself as an admitted variety in English poetry." The frequent syncope is almost always before liquids, after the fashion which, in Milton, has made some adopt what seems to me a false theory of prosody. And nearly, though not quite always, the MSS. (which are supposed to be more authentically representative of the author's own writing than most that we have) adopt the ugly "jamming together" of "the" and more rarely "to." Whether the words were so pronounced, or merely made subject to slide or slur, must be matter of opinion[3]—and opinions may also differ how far this preciseness contributes to the merits and defects of his work. The immense length of his poem, and the heterogeneous character of its contents, have no doubt, in modern times, done him at least as much harm as they secured him respect in his own, and those immediately following. He deserves, equally beyond doubt, no small credit for his accomplishment in a certain kind and degree of style, and for the almost complete manner in which he has mastered and applied his own conception of

His general quality.

[1] It is but fair to say that natives as well as foreigners are only too apt to shut their eyes, with almost ludicrous obstinacy, to that equivalence which makes so many rough places smooth. Gower does not indulge in it much, but he does sometimes.

[2] They should be taken into account by any one who wishes to make a thorough discussion of rhyme-royal after Chaucer.

[3] *V. inf.* on Chaucer.

the metre which he uses. And I am bound to say that the more I read Gower (and I have read him a good deal, both before and since Mr. Macaulay's edition for the first time did him justice) the less I am inclined to think him merely an example of polished long-windedness and accomplished monotony. But I do not think that he can ever be entirely cleared from these charges, and though it may seem unfair, I believe that his conception and execution of metre had a good deal to do with this. And I am confirmed in this belief by the chief instance in which he shook himself free from these defects—the really magnificent and should-be-well-known climax of the Medea story, where the sorceress perfects her spells.[1] Here the glamour of the legend has itself acted as a spell on Gower and has warmed him up. Therefore he *could* be warmed. Elsewhere it has not; therefore there was something that cooled the warmth. The something was not the matter, for in the myriad tales he tells there are others nearly as good as this. It was not his language, which is always competent if seldom consummate. Therefore it is at least possible that it was his metre.

Supposing, for the sake of argument, that it was, there is not much difficulty in assigning the cause. Gower, completing for Middle English the succession begun by

[1] Thus it befell vpon a nyht,
Whan ther was noght bot sterreliht,
Sche was vanyssht riht as hir liste,
That no wyht bot hirself it wiste;
And that was at[t]e mydnyht tyde;
The world was stille on euery side.
With open hed and fot al bare,
Hir her tosprad, sche gan to fare;
Vpon hir clothes gert sche was,
Al specheles, and on the gras
Sche glod forth as an addre doth.
Non otherwise sche ne goth,
Til sche cam to the freisshe flod,
And there a while sche withstod.
Thries sche torned hire aboute,
And thries ek sche gan doun loute;
And in the flod sche wette hir her,
And thries on the water ther
Sche gaspeth with a drecchinge onde,
And tho sche tok hir speche on honde.
Ferst sche began to clepe and calle
Vpward vnto the sterres alle;
To wynd, to air, to see, to lond
Sche preide, and ek hield vp hir hond;
To Echates and gan to crie,
Which is goddesse of sorcerie:
Sche seide, "Helpeth at this nede,
And as ye maden me to spede
Whan Iason cam the Flees to seche,
So helpe me nov, I you beseche."
With that sche loketh, and was war,
Doun fro the sky ther cam a char,
The which dragouns aboute drowe.
And tho sche gan hir hed doun bowe,
And vp sche styh, and faire and wel
Sche drof forth bothe char and whel
Above in thair among the skyes.
Ed. cit. sup. iii. pp. 54-55, Bk. v. ll. 3957-3993; Morris and Skeat, ii. pp. 274, 275, ll. 131-167.

the author of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, and declining that headed by him of *Genesis and Exodus*, has followed the French in rejecting[1] foot-elasticity, with the result of meeting the same—"disasters" is perhaps too strong a word, but—inconveniences, which they met. The liability of the French octosyllable to a sort of skipping-rope monotony, insignificant and even a little irritating, has been acknowledged in its own country, and certainly cannot escape any one out of it. And Gower generally does nothing to obviate or evade the danger. He does not, indeed, observe the strict hemistich cæsura, which, in the most extraordinary of his many extraordinary crotchets, Guest so solemnly censured Milton for disregarding. He avails himself freely, and perhaps more judiciously than Chaucer, of the paragraph-pause in the middle of a couplet. But, as we have said and seen, he is *plus quam* Chaucerian on syllabic uniformity, and he will not even allow himself the advantage of a period in the middle of the line. With these limitations, and with the further drawback of the very simple construction of his period as it stands, the result was more or less unavoidable. But we must never forget or undervalue the immense value of the example of accomplished prosody which Gower set so far as he went. In fact, it is hardly fantastic or obvious to say that if one could have bespoken three prosodic teachers for England at this moment, it would have been impossible to improve upon Chaucer, Gower, and Langland. We have seen what the second did in this chapter. We shall see what the third did in a later one. But the first must have a place to himself.

[1] Not entirely. Even Mr. Macaulay, who regards a trisyllabic foot as not a trisyllabic foot but an instance of a superfluous syllable to be accounted for, admits the existence of such syllables at iv. 1131, v. 447, v. 2914, v. 5011. And I could add many.

CHAPTER IV

CHAUCER

Plan of campaign—What Chaucer had before him in prosody—His work: The *Romaunt of the Rose*—The early "Minor Poems"—The *A B C* and its stanza—Rhetorical prosody—The *Complaint unto Pity*—Rhyme-royal—The *Book of the Duchess*—The *Complaint of Mars*—The *Parliament of Foules*—The other Minors—Their lesson—*Troilus and Creseide*—The *House of Fame*—Cadence, *note*—The decasyllable: retrospect of its origin; and study of its virtues—The *Legend of Good Women*—Digression on difficulties—The *crux* of text—"Critical" editions of the classics and of Middle English—Solid points for discussion: the stanza forms—The lines—Decapitation or initial monosyllabic foot—Trisyllabic feet—Elision and Slur—Trisyllabics proper—Alexandrines—Syllable-values—Rhyme—Note on "Chauceriana."

Plan of campaign.

WE now come to what would have been regarded, not so very long ago, as the starting-point, but what is in reality only the centre (if not even the real end) of the first stage of our enquiry—the prosody of Chaucer. Something of what has to be said as to his relations with his fore-runners and older contemporaries will fall best into the Interchapter which follows this book, but something also must be said here. Then we may give, in our usual fashion, a survey of the actual prosody of Chaucer's actual works, a survey which will not neglect the modern theories about them wholly, and which will always admit, for quoting, the most modern texts, but which will be mainly based on very many years' actual reading of Chaucer and Chaucer's predecessors and followers. After this it will be convenient to make a minuter study of foot- and verse-arrangement, syllabic values, rhyme, and

the like. I may add that though, as will be seen, I cannot agree with the principles on which some of the Chaucerian fringe has been cut off the garment, I shall confine myself, in the *text* of this chapter, to the matter of Dr. Skeat's *Student's Chaucer* and the *Globe* edition.[1]

What Chaucer had before him in prosody.

Those who have done me the honour to read the preceding pages will have a tolerably clear idea of what any man of fair education, and of interest in poetry, had, as prosodic data, about the seventh decade of the fourteenth century, towards the end of which Chaucer probably began. And certain slight additions can be made from internal evidence as to what he personally and actually had before him. Such a man, or such a poet, might belong to either (or to both) of the two great schools of purely metrical and purely alliterative prosodians. We know that, as a matter of practice, Chaucer, "a southern man," belonged to the former, and from the famous disclaimer of "rym ram ruff"[2] we may not unfairly conclude that he belonged to it as a matter of positive preference. What sort of prosodic models he had before him in English we may judge from the Auchinleck MS., apparently written some twenty years before, and the Vernon MS., apparently written not ten years after, his probable *début*. The contents of both of these have been elaborately analysed and discussed in the preceding pages. He would find in them[3] octosyllabic couplets and Romance sixes, the staples of English verse; but he would also find a very large number of more elaborate stanzas—the whole reducible, though never as yet by any preceptist reduced, to a system of foot-division, or of accent-grouping, according to taste.

But he had more means, material, machinery, at his disposal than those furnished by the pure vernacular. That he could have written trilingually, as Gower did with complete ease if not with complete scholarship, in English,

[1] I prefer the latter, on the whole, as presenting a text rather less "made up" according to theory.

[2] I give Gascoigne's form in his *Notes*. The MSS. of the *Parson's Prologue* seem to vary between *rum* and *rom*.

[3] As the perversity of some readers is only not incalculable, let me prevent it by observing that I do not mean by "them" the two MSS., but their contents. Some of those of the Auchinleck are mentioned in *Sir Thopas*.

French, and Latin, there is no evidence one way or another; that he did not so write there is at least the evidence that no such writing exists. But as every educated man of his generation still necessarily was (though according to the great passage of Trevisa[1] things were actually changing) he was perfectly familiar with French, which, as it happened, had for a century and more betaken itself to extremely elaborate, very strict, and in some cases very beautiful arrangements of prosodic form. And his earliest probable stage was occupied with direct translations and almost as direct imitations of French poetry. If not a Latin scholar—few people in his day deserved that name out of Italy, if many in it—he was familiar with Latin classical authors to some extent, and with the Dark and Middle Age writers to a large one. In particular, the Vulgate, and the hymns and services of the church, he must have known by heart. Everything points to his having, in somewhat later days, had a direct knowledge of Italian, which already possessed in Dante the greatest,[2] and in Petrarch and Boccaccio two of the most formally accomplished, of European men of letters, in prose and verse, for a thousand years past. His linguistic-literary equipment is not likely to have extended further, but this was a sufficiently wide range.

His work. The *Romaunt of the Rose.*

The *Romaunt of the Rose*, which is usually put in the front of Chaucer's works, is one of those which have fallen under the suspicion of modern scholars for reasons, many of which do not touch our subject, while the principal one that does touch it seems impossible of argument.[3] To be as accommodating as may be, however, let us say that the

[1] This will be referred to again.

[2] Chaucer's remarks on Dante in the *Legend*, if accidentally felicitous, are one of the oddest examples of accidental felicity in criticism.

[3] I repeat regretfully, respectfully, but peremptorily and irrevocably, that it *is* impossible to argue with persons who say that Chaucer never rhymes *Y* to *ye*, and then admit that he did in *Sir Thopas*, and say that it can easily be explained. Of course it can—by the fact that if he ever made a rule of the kind at one time he broke it at another—and in no second way. This unfortunate *lubie* of the late Mr. Bradshaw must, I suppose, be allowed to have its day; it will cease to be in time, like other things of the same kind. Meanwhile, let it be now observed that the various discussions about the English *Romaunt*, and the way in which its parts are chopped and changed by this

English *Romaunt of the Rose*, whether Chaucer's or not, displays with rare exceptions, though perhaps with those exceptions, no very great advance upon, and even no very great difference from, precedent octosyllabic couplet work, especially such (the great majority) as is translated from French.

The author or authors seems or seem to have sufficiently realised the first secret of music in this metre—the overrunning of the line; and less fully the second, that of the overrunning of the couplet. The third, the putting of a full stop at the end of the first line, which relieves the variety of the verse paragraph, is also known. There is a little, but not much, equivalence:[1] but there is very little, if anything, of the other secret, which Chaucer afterwards learnt so thoroughly, of alternating lines of strict and full iambic cadence with those where a monosyllabic foot at the beginning turns that cadence to trochaic. Nor is there much understanding of pause-variation, though sometimes we find a full stop early in the line.[2] The value for us of the whole piece, however, is lessened by the preciseness with which (in part at least) it keeps to its original. The languages were by this time close enough to each other to make this easy, and when there was any difficulty it scarce required the wit of a Chaucer to supply such a *cheville* as

An emperesse or *crowned* queen

for

D'estre emperieris ou roine

(though it may be observed that "crownèd" is a distinct improvement to the sound, if not to the sense of the line), or

The *lusty* folk that danced there

---

and that distributor, are characteristic. In this book we do not rope-dance, but keep to solid paths, and where the paths are not solid we do not care to walk.

[1] More than in Gower, less than in most of the romances.

[2] *E.g.* 6322—

As I. For I come never in toune.

Near this are some lines which *I* should take as slipped decasyllables.

for

Ainsi karoloient illecques.

On the whole, however, the poem is fairly free from the abominable stock-stuffings—"verament," "everichone," and the like—which are so frequent elsewhere. But it has little new for us.[1]

The early "Minor Poems."

The so-called "Minor Poems" of the French period, the majority of which are fortunately unchallenged, have more. The use of elaborate, and even very elaborate, stanzas was, as we know well, not itself a novelty; we have them in very fair perfection, and in very great variety, as far back as the Harleian *Lyrics*, which were pretty certainly written half a century, and may have been written the best part of a century, before Chaucer's time. But with rare exceptions, most of which have been pointed out, these stanzas do not run quite easily, and the exceptions themselves are due rather to inspiring force of subject—to a little passing gust of poetry in feeling—than to assured craftsmanship. Now, as has been said above, the French had for more than a century been writing elaborate forms of poetry most sedulously, and had turned out, in several different kinds of continuous stanza, and in the smaller integers of triolet, rondeau, ballade, and the like, the most artificial perhaps, but certainly not the least artful and artistic, of poetic arrangements.

[1] An extract, however, may be desirable :—

Hir heer was as yelowe of hewe
As ony basyn scoured newe,
Hir flesh [as] tendre as is a chike,
With bente browis smothe and slyke;
And by mesure large were
The openyng of hir yen clere;
Hir nose of good proporcioun,
Hir yen grey as is a faucoun;
With swete breth and wel savoured,
Hir face white and wel coloured,
With litel mouth and rounde to see;
A clove chynne eke hadde she,
Hir nekke was of good fasoun,
In lengthe and gretnesse by resoun,
Withoute bleyne, scabbe, or royne;
Fro Iersalem unto Burgoyne
Ther nys a fairer nekke, i-wys,
To fele how smothe and softe it is.
Hir throte also white of hewe
As snowe on braunche snowed newe.
Of body ful wel wrought was she,
Men neded not in no cuntre
A fairer body forto seke.
And of fyn orfrays hadde she eke
A chapelet so semly oon
Ne werede never mayde upon.
And faire above that chapelet
A rose gerland had she sett.
She hadde [in honde] a gay mirrour,
And with a riche gold tresour
Hir heed was tressed, queyntely.
Hir sleves sewid fetously,
And forto kepe hir hondis faire
Of gloves white she had a paire.
And she hadde on a cote of grene
Of cloth of Gaunt, withouten wene.

ll. 539-574.

The *A B C* and its stanza.

In what is sometimes supposed to be his very first work, the *A B C*—in what certainly may be his first as well as any other—there are divers noteworthy things. Like the *Romaunt*, it is a direct translation; but, unlike the *Romaunt*, it does not follow the prosody of its original, but innovates in a remarkable way. That original is in a twelve-line stanza of octosyllables rhymed *aabaabbbcbbc*. Chaucer shortens the stanza and lengthens the line, using eight decasyllables rhymed *ababbcbc*.[1] Now this instinctive and early striking out for the great staple line of English poetry is a prosodic fact, the importance of which cannot be overrated. It had for centuries been one of the staples (it was perhaps the oldest of all) in French, and it corresponded (with the necessary difference in the two languages) to the hendecasyllable which had established itself as the staple of Italian. But though there had been, as we have seen, sporadic examples of it, and even of its couplet, in English, it had never been staple, had never been used continuously and deliberately, had never even made frequent appearance. Yet Chaucer, as to the manner born, seems to have hardly the slightest difficulty with it. That he is a beginner is perhaps shown by the facts, not merely that he wields it with less varied ease than later, but that he writes it with some severity. There is possible trisyllabic equivalence in one or two places

> Haven of refute, of quiete and of reste,

and

> Ever hath myn hope of refut been in thee,

where, of course, some folk would apply their rule of elision before liquids, and scan "hav'n" and "ev'r." He has some double rhymes that are not feminine, such as

[1] *E.g.*—

> Al myghty and al mercyable Queene,
> To whom that al this world fleeth for socour
> To have relees of sinne, of sorwe, and teene!
> Glorious Virgine, of alle floures flour,
> To thee I flee confounded in errour.
> Help, and releeve, thou mihti debonayre,
> Have mercy on my perilous langour!
> Venquisshed me hath my cruel adversaire.

"never" and "ever," where the same note may be made if any one likes. He does not appear to trouble himself with the French decasyllabic cæsura at the fourth syllable, for though it sometimes appears, it is quite as often absent. Indeed, as we see from Gascoigne—much later but almost as early as we have an opportunity of seeing anything of the kind—a rational idea grew up (even in times which had the superstition of this cæsura) that it was less binding in stanza than in couplet. Still, where he dares a full, or very strong, stop in the middle of a line, it is generally at this fourth syllable.

Rhetorical prosody.

This last point brings us to the consideration of a new class of prosodic characteristics, which it has been hardly worth while to consider earlier, the class which may be called rhetorical-prosodic; where devices are employed, not immediately or not wholly for versification, but as they might be employed in prose, to enhance the beauty of sound. These, except of a very rudimentary description, can only be found when a language and its writers have arrived at a certain point of accomplishment. Such a thing as the sharp pull-up just noticed[1] is itself of them, though on the more prosodic side. Two others to be mentioned now incline rather to the rhetorical. One of these, the least noticeable, though neither is unnoticeable here, is the well-known reduplication of synonyms, as in

> Haven of refute, of quiete and of reste,

which has nothing whatever to correspond to it in the French. Still more noteworthy is the first sign of that *epanaphora*, or trick of beginning successive lines with the same word or words, which Chaucer afterwards indulged in very freely, and which his successors, including even the earlier Elizabethans, not seldom abused:

> O verrey light of eyen that ben blynde,
> O verrey lust of labour and distresse.

The *Complaint unto Pity*, even if it be not (as some

[1] As in l. 12—

> Axeth thyn helpe. Thyn herte is ay so free.

The *Complaint unto Pity.*

again think), and as it may very well be, the actually earliest, and even if it be (as some also think) a translation of a French poem not yet identified, has an even higher interest. For here we have, beyond reasonable doubt, the first English piece in the great Rhyme-royal, or seven-lined stanza of decasyllables rhymed *ababbcc*, which Chaucer afterwards brought to such perfection, and which long held the premier place among our stanza forms. His pitching on it, and his preference of it, are fresh proofs of his instinctive genius for prosody. It is not, indeed, a stanza-of-all-work. But it can do several things well, and one thing, the expression of clangorous cry, it can do supremely. It is odd that, this being so, the very first example of it should be in so suitable a subject; for the expression itself is not very successful. The poet's instinct is true, but his craftsmanship is as yet incomplete. It can hardly be quite accidental that the MS. variations in the piece are unusually numerous and serious, not least from our special point of view. Some of them, if original, would certainly show that Chaucer's prosody was not born full grown, in which, indeed, there would be nothing remarkable but the reverse.[1]

Rhyme-royal.

The *Book of the Duchess.*

Still on the mounting hand is the interest of the *Book of the Duchess.* Nobody disputes its genuineness, or its

[1] A single line (50) will give us a curious and capital instance of what is called critical editing. Of the seven MSS. which Professor Skeat collates two give—

Thanne leve I alle thees vertues sauf pitee;

two—

Then leve we al vertues saue oonly pite;

three—

Then leve all vertues saue onely pite.

Now none of these will scan according to the orthodox values of the final *e*. So you take the text of the first group and spell it according to the others, and you get

Then leve I al thise virtues sauf pite.

But we ought to give a whole stanza—

Pite that I have sought so yore ago
With herte sore and ful of besy peyne,
That in this worlde was never wight so wo
With-oute dethe; and if I shal not feyne,
My purpos was to Pite to compleyne
Upon the crueltee and tirannye
Of Love, that for my trouthe doth me dye.

5200 c

solidarity, or its earliness, and it is in the octosyllabic couplet, so that we are able to study Chaucer's handling, of the most popular English metre before his day, undisturbed by any quibbles or irrelevances. He has by no means reached the mastery of it which he afterwards showed in the *House of Fame*, but which he did not care, elsewhere or later still, to exhibit at all. Yet he is already far above the level of the bulk of his predecessors. As in the *Romaunt*, and as we should expect, the model is the non-equivalenced one of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, not the equivalenced one of *Genesis and Exodus*. But it displays the catalectic - trochaic alternation. Once (ll. 471-472) we find a curious identical rhyme ("song" and "song" in the same sense), which is followed by a pretty lyric or strophe-arrangement—an onzain divided into five and six, and rhymed *aabbaccdccd*. And, a little out of the strict prosodic road, we may note the ease with which the verse is made subservient to conversation, partly by the obvious device of splitting the couplets between the interlocutors, and sometimes by the slightly more daring one of splitting a line between them; but never, I think, by running on one speech into a line and then beginning another in the same, which is the crowning grace.[1]

[1] Or outrage, according to the famous *perruque* critic of *Hernani*. A short couplet batch, chosen to show the *dialogue*, and the onzain, may follow :—

"Sir," quod I, "wher is she now?"
"Now!" quod he, and stynte anoon.
Therwith he wex as deed as stoon
And seyde, "Allas, that I was bore!
That was the los, that her-before
I tolde the that I hadde lorn;
Bethenk how I seyde herbeforn;
'Thow wost ful litel what thou menest;
I have lost more than thou wenest!'
God wot, allas! right that was she!"
"Allas! sir, how? what may that be?"
"She ys deed!"
"Nay!"
"Yis, by my trouthe!"
"Is that your los? by God, hit is routhe!"
And with that worde right anoon
They gan to strake forth; al was doon
For that tyme, the hert-huntying.
ll. 1297-1312.

I have of sorwe so grete woon
That joye gete I never noon,
Now that I see my lady bright,
Which I have loved with al my myght,
Is fro me deed and is a-goon.
Allas, Deeth, what ayleth thee
That thou noldest have taken me,
Whan thou toke my lady sweete
That was so fayr, so fresh, so fre,
So good, that men may wel se
Of al goodnesse she had no meete.
ll. 475-485.

The *Complaint of Mars.*

There is more metrical experiment in the curious composite poem called the *Complaint of Mars*, where Chaucer has rather scandalised some of his admirers by celebrating an intrigue between Princess Isabel of Castille, Duchess of York, and John Holland, Duke of Exeter. The proem and the story are in rhyme-royal; but the "Complaint" itself is in a nine-line stanza[1] of some complexity, decasyllabically lined, and rhymed *aabaabbcc*, which may be regarded either as a six-line body with a triplet coda, or as a triplet with three couplets strung to it, or as rhyme-royal with two lines (2nd and 5th) inserted. It is by no means unimportant to observe that in both these stanza-metres the couplet itself plays a very large part. These forms gave him ample exercise in both forms of it—the strophes of the *Complaint* stanza in the "enjambed," the final couplets of rhyme-royal in the "stopped."

The *Parliament of Foules.*

The *Parliament of Foules* is wholly rhyme-royal, with a splendid piece of cadence[2]—the first great thing, perhaps, in Chaucer—at the opening, others later, and a very pretty "roundel,"[3] "Now, welcome, summer," which may be the earliest example of these forms in English.

The other Minors.

The remainder of the minor poems, whether they be all of one time or not, and discarding the minor questions

[1] To whom shal I then pleyne of my distresse?
Who may me helpe? Who may my harm redresse?
Shall I compleyne unto my lady fre?
Nay, certes! for she hath such hevynesse,
For fere, and eek for wo, that, as I gesse,
In litil tyme it wol her bane be.
But were she sauf, it were no fors of me!
Alas! that ever lovers mote endure,
For love, | so ma|ny a pe|rilous a|venture!
ll. 191-198.

[2] The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Thassay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
The dredful joye, alwey that slit so yerne;
Al this mene I be love, etc.

[3] Now welcom, somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders overshake
And driven a-wey the longe nyghtes blake.

Lines 1 and 2 repeated *twice* and 3 *once*, woven ingeniously with others into *thirteen* and rhymed *abbabab-abbabb*.

of authenticity, supply interesting evidences of Chaucer's metrical *Wanderjahre*. Especially interesting is the collection of fragments, which older copyists seem to have taken as a *coda* to the *Complaint of Pity*, but which Professor Skeat groups as a *Complaint to his Lady*. The first, consisting of two stanzas of rhyme-royal, strikes me (I dare say it has struck others) as of real value in connection with the development of the quatorzain or English sonnet by Wyatt and Surrey, just when there was a renewed study of Chaucer. It is followed by certain experiments in terza rima,[1] which have interest of the same kind, in redoubled measure, as affecting the answers to two questions of extreme importance: "Why did Chaucer, at a time when he was evidently under very strong Italian influence, not make further experiments in this favourite metre of the 'great poet of Italy'?" and "Why has this metre never really acclimatised itself with us?" The double answer is, of course, obvious: "Because he found, and because all have found, that it would not do." The rest, and the bulk of the piece (if we may so call it), is in ten-line stanzas, a sixain tipped not with triplet "unicorned" like that of the *Mars* poem, but with a quatrain of decasyllables rhymed *In Memoriam* fashion—as a whole *aabaabcddc*.[2]

Annelida—to use the old form (the double *n* is prettier

[1] Hir name is Bountee, set in womanhede,
Sadnesse in youthe and Beautee pridelees
And Plesaunce, under governaunce and drede;
Hir surname eek is Faire Rewthelees,
The Wyse, y-knit un-to Good Aventure,
That, for I love hir, she sleeth me giltelees.

[2] My dere herte and best beloved fo,
Why liketh yow to do me al this wo,
What have I doon that greveth yow, or sayd,
But for I serve and love yow and no mo?
And whilst I lyve I wol ever do so;
And therfor, swete, ne beth nat yvel apayd.
For so good and so fair as [that]* ye be
Hit were right gret wonder but ye hadde
Of alle servantes, bothe of goode and badde;
And leest worthy of alle hem, I am he.

* Supplied by Professor Skeat.

and there is MS. authority for it)—*and Arcite*, a beautiful poem, has a frame, or rather a long beginning and a single stanza end, of rhyme-royal, which was evidently Chaucer's metrical stand-by at this time; but nearly half of it, between the beginning and the end, has remarkable variations. First, we get the nine-line *Mars* stanza, arranged in two corresponding blocks, which Professor Skeat very justifiably calls "strophe" and "antistrophe." Each of four of the niners is followed by a fifth,[1] which consists of sixteen lines in batches of four-three octosyllables and a decasyllable, rhymed *aaab*, *aaab*, *bbba*, *bbba*—and a sixth,[2] which is Chaucer's only attempt at the ringing internally rhymed carol arrangement.

Of the rest, the half-jocular, half-angry, rebuke to Adam, his scrivener, is a rhyme-royal stanza; "The Former Age" is in decasyllabic octaves rhymed *ababbcc*; and the rest, including the *Complaint of Venus*, are ballads and roundels, except the "Proverbs of Chaucer," which are quatrains of eights rhymed alternately.

Their lesson.

The lessons of these early poems are quite clear and easy to disengage. Chaucer has found an English prosody already thoroughly broken to the use of foot-divisions and their arrangement in metrical groups, and he does not attempt any startling innovations or reformations upon it

[1] Now cer|tes, swe|te, thogh | that ye
Thus cau|seles | the cau|se be,
Of my | dedly adver|sitee,
Your man|ly re|soun oght|e it to | respite,

and so on to sixteen.

[2] My swete foo, why do ye so, for shame?
And thenke ye that furthered be your name,
To love a-newe, and ben untre | we? Nay!
And putte you in sclaunder now and blame,
And do to me adversitee and grame,
That love you most—God, wel thou wost!—alway?
Yet turn ageyn, and be al pleyn som day,
And then shall this, that now is mis, be game,
And al foryive, whyl that I li|ve may.

This, of course, is interesting to compare with "E.I.O." and "The Nut-Browne Mayde," and to note the shortened and, as it were, "pulled up" effect of the places marked. Chaucer, though not ill, was not supremely well at these *carillon* numbers. Yet some have even called the piece "Pindaric," and it is certainly both ingenious and pleasing. (Cf. notes, pp. 137 and 328.)

as far as feet go. He uses, on the whole, the severe forms, except in his predilection (which was to continue) for an occasional monosyllabic opening foot. In metres, however, he is decidedly eclectic and experimental, and calls both French and Italian to his aid. He practises the old octosyllabic couplet, but does not seem to have any great fancy for it: and he practises the new French artificial forms, but without very much eagerness or very brilliant success. On the other hand, he hits (in the seven-lined stanza with end-couplet, the "rhyme-royal") on a form which evidently suits him, and which, not merely by the effect of his example, holds a very great place in English poetry for the two next centuries. Moreover, he shows in his handling of these various vehicles distinct mastery, and a great freedom from the two faults —straggling looseness and wooden precision—which had characterised most earlier verse.

But it is important to notice that both in diction and versification—more particularly in that adaptation of the two which was later to be his great glory—he as yet shows no very brilliant accomplishment. The opening of the *Parliament of Foules* is the chief exception, and there are few more. If these poems stood alone to his credit, it is but merely trivially obvious to say that he would hold no great place in English poetry. It would be strictly and critically correct to say: "Here was a man who seemed to have a surer prosodic grasp than any previous writer; one who showed the definite constitution of English prosody, but not much more."

Troilus and Creseide.

All this makes the final outcome of this period, in the completed and substantive work belonging to the next, a most interesting thing. The delightful romance of *Troilus and Creseide* has been abundantly illustrated, in respect of its indebtedness of matter, by the very painful and very useful industry (here quite in place) of the modern scholar. It is—in another department of strictly literary criticism from that which we are pursuing—a great document against the idle notion that Chaucer disliked, despised, and depreciated Romance itself. But here

we are busy only with its form. As such, it is the finished work — the diploma-piece, such as but few diploma-pieces are—of that period itself. Chaucer has preferred the prosodic form, which in his 'prentice period he had already selected, that of rhyme-royal, and of this preference merely as such, or of the qualifications of the stanza, there is no need to say any more than has been said. But of his accomplishment in it there is much more. The earlier pieces had been scarcely of substance enough individually, or of variety enough taken as a whole, to show the capacities of the metre, and Chaucer had in them done little more than produce "copies of verses," such as, let us say, the author of the "copy of verses" generally does *not* produce. Here he had buckled to quite a different task. This is not the place to dilate upon the extraordinary interest of the Troilus story—that story which, hardly suggested in the classical Tale of Troy, took form, so far as we know, under the hands of Benoît de Sainte-More, was continued by Guido delle Colonne, and Boccaccio, and taken up by Chaucer himself, Henryson, Shakespeare, and Dryden, in a fashion which has left us a group of compositions by greater and lesser masters, hardly one of which is negligible, and most of which are great. Chaucer's is not one of the exceptions, and the greatness is due in large measure to qualities which come fairly under our purview, whether as pure prosodic matter or as what we have called rhetorical-prosodic; in other words, in respect of versification and diction.

As to the first point, there can, to any reader with a careful eye and a good ear, be no question about the immense gain of fluency and exactness combined which *Troilus* shows. It is not even necessary to use the text in which the obliging hand of Professor Skeat has judiciously restored, and perhaps in a few cases supplied, readings according to the strictest orthodoxy of the final *e*, and similar things, or that less composite one with which, in the "Globe" edition, Professor M'Cormick has given us a useful companion. The comparatively unregenerate *textus receptus*

of the Moxon one-volume edition will be quite satisfactory to any one with such an eye and such an ear. The stanzas "set," in the dancing sense, to themselves and each other with an accomplished grace; they carry out the combined figures, if not with such perfect accomplishment as in the possibly later *Prioress's Tale*, at any rate with a great advance in it over the earlier examples of the metre. But besides this we begin to get—what we got rarely or not at all earlier—those single lines or short batches of perfected prosodic and symphonic beauty, which are the *sine qua non* of really great poetry. How caressing is the throb and soar of the *Cantus Troili* in the first book:—

> If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
> And if love is, what thing and which is he?
> If love be good, from whennes comth my wo?

No matter whether Italian or French, or his own soul, taught him this melody; the point is that he has *found* it—that it is there.

Turn the leaves over at random and come to such a line as iv. 816—

> The mighty tresses of hir sonnish heres,

and see how he varies the vowel sound; dip again and you will again find. But, of course, the crucial examples of this, as of other excellence in the poem, are the three famous passages, first of Cressida's surrender—the universally known

> And as the newe abaysshed nightingale—

the magnificent address of the desolate lover to the palace also desolate, and the conclusion. Up to this time, though the lyre of English prosody is pretty well built and quite capable of producing musical sounds, it has never been thoroughly in tune, could never be quite trusted to apply concord and discord alike for the total production of harmony. Now, there is no more doubt. The tuner has come. But perhaps his main instrument of adjustment is, after all, his diction—his command of

the famous "gold dew-drops of speech,"[1] already to no small if not to the fullest extent. We find it in occasional epithets and phrases ("Fortune, executrice of *wierdes*," etc.) where the trick-combination of Latin and Saxon vocabulary is evidently known and practised; but still more in the purple patches, the set passages already indicated and others. The compass of rhyme-royal, as has been hinted, is not quite so wide as its appeal is poignant. But Chaucer knows already how to make the best of both in a way never surpassed by any of his successors, and perhaps only equalled by Sackville in his two little masterpieces.[2]

Still the compass *is* rather narrow, and a very much

[1] Might not this admirable phrase have saved its poor author, whoever he was, from dismissal of the piece as "a poor stanza," and a "poor imitation of the style of Lydgate"? Even if he stole it from somebody else, he gave it rightly to the right person, wobble and "wamble" as his poor verses may.

[2] To illustrate the *karole*—the musical dance above noticed—take these stanzas—

> And whan that he was slayn in this manére
> His lighte goost ful blisfully is went
> Up to the holwnesse of the eighte spere,
> In convers leting everich element:
> And ther he saugh with ful avisement
> Th'erratik sterres, herkning armonye
> With sounes fulle of hevenissh melodye.
>
> And down from thennes faste he gan avise
> This litel spot of erthe that with the see
> Embraced is, and fully gan despise
> This wrecched world, and held al vanité
> To réspect of the pleyne felicite
> That is in hevene above. And at the laste,
> Ther he was slayn his loking down he caste,
>
> And in himself he lough right at the wo
> Of hem that wepen for his deth so faste,
> And dampned al our werk, that folwen so
> The blinde lust the whiche that may not laste,
> And sholden al our herte on hevene caste.
> And forth he wente, shortly for to telle,
> Ther-as Mercúrie sorted him to dwelle.
>
> Swich fyn hath tho this Troilus for love!
> Swich fyn hath al his grete worthinesse!
> Swich fyn hath his estat reál above!
> Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse!
> Swich fyn, this false worldes brotelnesse!—
> And thus bigan his loving of Criseyde
> As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.
>
> ll. 1807-1834.

smaller person than Chaucer must have found this out in writing eight thousand lines of it. At any rate he deserted the measure in his two next poems, poems where the interest still heightens, prosodically and otherwise. He had found out, no doubt, that it is not very well suited for narrative, save of a very brief or a very discursive character, dealing little with action and character, and that it is (unless wilfully burlesqued and parodied in mock-heroic) as deficient in lightness as it is full of pathos and gravity. Now both the poems which he proceeded to write were narrative, and the first of them had a strong satiric tendency. For it, he fell back once more on the old octosyllabic couplet—for the last time, but also with far the best success. The *House of Fame* is in the good sense a very comfortable poem, and it is by no means least comfortable prosodically.[1] The *House of Fame.*

At the beginning of the Third Book Chaucer makes a curious apology,[2] echoed with much better reason by

[1] I am particularly anxious not to multiply differences with Professor Skeat. But surely it is very misleading to say, true enough as all the statements are: "The four-accent metre was commonly known before Chaucer's time," that "it was used by Robert of Brunne in 1303, in the *Cursor Mundi* and in *Havelok*," being, however, "of French origin." All these statements are, I say, true; but how very far do they fall short of the whole truth! The "four-accent metre," octosyllabic couplet, or iambic dimeter, is practically the staple metre of English verse from Layamon to Hampole, both included. Layamon himself, a century before Robert, the author of *Genesis and Exodus*, and the author of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, a vast proportion of the romancers, and a vast proportion of the religious verse-makers all alike use it. And further, to say that "it occurs in the *Roman de la Rose*," though again quite true, obscures the fact that, long before Lorris, it had been used by Chrestien and the other French authors of the Arthurian poems, that it is the staple of the Renart cycle, of the *Fabliaux*, of the *Romans d'aventures* generally. All this Professor Skeat knows as well as I do, and did know long before I knew it. But his readers do not know in one case out of a hundred, and they could hardly learn it from his words.

[2] Nat that I wilne, for maistrye
Here art poetical be shewed;
But, for the rym is light and lewed,
Yit make hit sumwhat agreable,
Thogh som vers faile in a sillable.

There is yet another prosodic reference in the *House of Fame*, which has been the occasion of so much discussion that it may perhaps best be treated here at some little length. This is where the eagle, in his amusing and very unceremonious talk with Chaucer, observes that the poet has never yet received any favours from Venus or Cupid—

many of his fellows, for his metre. As a matter of fact he manages the light and lewed rhyme very agreeably. His verses that omit a syllable hit the very genius of English poetry, and, though their lesson was at one time lost or slighted, helped Milton and Dyer and Coleridge to keep the precious torch alight. But he was evidently not quite satisfied with it, as appears not merely from the apology, which might be a mere piece of manners, or even of fun, but still more from the fact that he left the piece unfinished, and most of all from the other fact that he never again attempted the form. I do not know, sorry as I should be not to have the *House of Fame*, that he was wrong. The metre is crisp, fresh, and alive; the "failing" syllable gives variety and more freshness, and the poet uses effectively the device above referred to

Cadence.

> And neverthelesse hast set thy wyt
> (Although that in thy heed ful lyte is)
> To make bookes, songes, or dytees
> In ryme *or elles in cadence*.

Now what, it is asked, is this "cadence" which is so opposed to "rhyme"? "Alliteration" of course, say some. Without being in a hurry to answer them, let us cite two other "classic places." One of these is from Gower (*Conf. Am.* iv. 2414)—

> And Heredot in his science
> Of metre, of rime, *and of cadence*,
> The firste was of which men note.

The other is Wyntoun's (*Orig. Cron.* Bk. v. ch. xii. 4336)—

> Had he cald Lucyus Procuratoure
> Quhare that he cald hym Empyrowre,
> That had mare grevyd the *cadens*
> Than had relevyd the sentens.

The mere quotation of these side by side ought to show that, at any rate, "alliteration" was not a *specific* meaning of "cadence" known to and used by the three writers; and it seems to me to show that none of them can have, by cadence, meant alliteration at all. We do not know that Chaucer wrote any alliterative verse; and we do know the *ad infinitum* cited *locus* suggesting that he did not. Whomsoever and whatsoever Gower meant by "Heredot" (Mr. Macaulay has no note dealing with the passage) he most certainly did *not* mean that any of the ancients whom he is cataloguing wrote like Langland. And, as a matter of fact, the substitution of "Procurator" for "Emperor" need not "grieve" alliterative verse at all, so that Wyntoun certainly did not refer to it and did refer to "cadence" in ordinary sense. In one or other form of this last I myself see no reason whatever to doubt that the word is used in all three. (For King James and his supposed translation of "cadence" into "*tumbling* verse" we may wait till we come to him.)

of finishing the sense of a paragraph at the first line of a couplet. But in avoiding the "lubricity" of the French original—the way in which the couplets slip away without mark or "bite," and which Gower has thoroughly transferred—the author has incurred a certain lack of ease, of fluency and fluidity. I think myself that there are some decasyllables in it,[1] as there had been in the work of the kind turned out by other practitioners; whether there are or not, Chaucer must have felt the cramp and "fidget" of so short a unit, for after it he turned definitely to the longer one, and usually, though not always, to the couplet form of it.

The decasyllable—retrospect of its origin,

As to the origin of this, there have been great but perhaps unnecessary searchings of heart, which have as usual even obscured the true objects of search. Everybody with some small knowledge of old French knew, of course, that the decasyllable itself, in long batches of mono-rhymed[2] lines, is perhaps the oldest of all metres in French, and is certainly the staple metre of the oldest extant French literature. But this knowledge implied the other, that the French, before Chaucer's time, did not often or largely use it in couplets, though the octosyllabic couplet had been one of their staples for centuries. It was therefore a great relief to some, though one not in the least needed by others, when a poem[3] by Guillaume de Machault, Chaucer's certain model in some things, was discovered in this metre.

Now I do not think it in the least necessary to doubt that Chaucer knew this poem, and perhaps others, and that their existence was not without some influence on his adoption, if not creation, of the great English epic, satiric, almost pan- (or pam-) poetic vehicle. But I am quite certain that he might have devised it independently of Machault, and I am by no means certain that he did not do so. It is one evil of the accent or beat theory that it

[1] *E.g.* i. 12; iii. 1967.

[2] Or mono-assonanced.

[3] The *Complainte après la bataille de Poitiers*. See Tarbé's ed., Paris and Rheims, 1849, p. 89; and Professor Skeat's *Chaucer*, iii. 383.

obscures attention to the syllabic constitution of the line. If that attention is used properly, I am quite certain that not only decasyllabic lines but decasyllabic couplets, rude, and sometimes not so very rude, in English poems before and sometimes long before Chaucer, are unmistakable. I have called attention to these often here, but the matter is important enough to justify their repeated citation, especially as there is hardly a point which has been more generally overlooked, and which is received with more incredulity when presented.

In fact it would have been very extraordinary if the heroic had *not* "separated itself from the heap," to employ once more the precious phrase for which we must ever thank our sometimes Shylock Guest. On our own general hypothesis of the application of the metrical moulds of French and Latin to the rhythmical matter of English blended with them, and of the resulting constitution of all forms that really suited that language, it could not but do so. But there is a stronger reason in the peculiarly loose and *molybdine* character of these earliest stages of English prosody, while the rigid syllabicism of French lessened the same chance there. A Frenchman *might* deliberately say to himself, "We have been using the decasyllabic line and the octosyllabic couplet for ages; so let us 'combine our information' and use the decasyllabic couplet which we already have in *laisse* and stanza." But he was not likely to stumble into this latter by accident and then, seeing that he had stumbled upon a good thing, to keep it on purpose. Many an Englishman, on the other hand, had, as we have shown, done the first, and an Englishman who was Chaucer was not at all unlikely to do the latter. The irregularity even of the more rigid octosyllabic distich, the elasticity of the equivalenced one, made such things as those which have been quoted certain to occur, when one remembers the almost uncanny virtues of the decasyllable itself, the way in which it has, in one form or another, imposed itself upon every great literary nation in Europe (except the Spaniards) as the longest line and therefore

the most capacious of sense that will give a thoroughly satisfactory continuous medium for sound.[1] But besides all this Chaucer had another strong reason for adopting the decasyllabic couplet, which was this, that he had actually been writing it for years at the close of each of his rhymes-royal. He had written more than a thousand such couplets in *Troilus*, he had written numbers in other poems, and, as has been seen, some of his most apparently elaborate stanzas resolve themselves in part into a mere sequence of decasyllabic couplets. And such a master, at once of rhetoric and poetry, could not fail, with such practice, to see its extraordinary advantages, though no doubt he saw these, as he shows them, more and more till the end. The heroic gives that elbow-room which the octosyllable denies; it retains the attraction, without imposing too much of the tyranny, of rhyme; it avoids the blocky and broken-up character of stanza writing; it gives in every particular room enough, and not too much room, for authentically prosodic and prosodic-rhetorical exercise and ornament; it is easy in a general way, without the fatal fluency and facility of the octosyllable itself; it offers much less temptation to the *cliché* and the *cheville*—the stereotyped padding and the cut-and-dried tag. And lastly, though even genius could hardly discover this at once, it provides opportunity for a variety of adjustment and appeal which is marvellous and almost endless. Nothing can speak more highly for Chaucer's metrical genius itself—though of course he had a certain advantage in the paucity of models before him—than the fact that he never put himself under articles, either to the enjambed or to the stopped couplet, as poets of other ages have in turn done. If there is one secret that he does not seem to have fully discovered, it is the virtue of the full stop within the line. But even he had to leave something for others.

and study of its virtues.

He took to this couplet, anyhow; and while the whole

[1] The French Alexandrine is the only (and only an apparent) exception. I do not, of course, mean that the Spaniards did not use the decasyllable. But they continued to prefer the "short line" as a staple, especially in drama.

of the *Legend of Good Women* (barring the inset Ballade) is in this metre, the exceptions in the *Canterbury Tales* are but exceptions. The *Man of Law's*, *Clerk's*, *Prioress's*, and *Second Nun's Tales* are in rhyme-royal, and the *Monk's* in octaves, while the *Rhyme of Sir Thopas*, for obvious reasons of parody, is in Romance sixes. But all the rest, and all the prologues and interim conversations which frame the whole, are in heroics, or as the old phrase better put this variety, "riding rhyme."[1] To expatiate on the delights of all is for the historian of English Literature, not for the historian of English Prosody. It is, however, within our competence to point out that the *Legend of Good Women*, though it lacks the astounding variety in accomplishment of the *Prologue*, the splendour of the best parts in the *Knight's Tale*, and the humorous flexibility of the comic stories, already shows remarkable command of the capacity of the metre for narrative purposes. The *Prohemium* in particular, where the poet has elbow-room, and can run over a wider gamut than in renderings of the pathetic stories of the "martyrdom" of the dames and damsels of old, is a most remarkable thing in its adaptation of the almost infant metre to the needs of irony, of description, of fancy, of argument, and of debate. When a metrical child is thus brought up in the way it should go, it is likely to go far.[2]

The *Legend of Good Women*.

Digression on difficulties.

But the arrangement and examination of Chaucer's larger prosodic forms, though an indispensable part of our duty, and perhaps that which demands most space, is scarcely the most important part. Of that most important part the consideration of the general prosodic *effect* is itself a subdivision: the rest concerns the very vital matters of foot-constitution, quantity or accent, line-arrangement, rhyme, and the like. And here the difficulty which besets all this earlier part of our enquiry reaches its acutest stage.

[1] If any one wishes to know why I say "better," let him look at a really good horseman *walking* his horse.

[2] It was certain that the discovery of two versions of the *Prologue to the Legend* would lead to conflicting theories as to last and first, and it has done so. Metrically there is no striking difference: or rather the differences are *cross*, and cancel one another.

That difficulty is plumply and plainly this, *that we have no means of ascertaining with any certainty what, exactly, Chaucer wrote*; by which I do not mean to touch anew on the *eternum vulnus* of the genuine and spurious works. What I mean is that in the case of the things most certainly and indisputably Chaucer's—the Prologue, say, or the *Knight's Tale*, or the *Rhyme of Sir Thopas*—we cannot, except by guesswork, decide what exact words Chaucer wrote, and still less in what exact spelling he wrote them. The stages of the history of the text are briefly and roundly three. We have a large number of early MSS., and we have some fairly early printed editions which are allowed by the most fastidious scholar to have their weight. But I do not think that any of the extremest of fanatics or fantastics has ever suggested that we have a line of Chaucer's own handwriting in the MSS.: while even Caxton's print is shut off by some seventy years from the possibility of Chaucer having supervised the printing.

The *crux* of text.

Then we have a further number of printed editions only—possessing no authority whatever except what they may have derived from MSS., and dating partly from the times when Chaucer was still a great name but had not been actually studied at all, partly from the later times when even those who thought him a genius had made up their minds that he did not know how to scan. During this time, naturally, there grew up and flourished—it had begun even in the fifteenth century, and among the MSS. themselves—a process of arbitrarily "mending" Chaucer, of putting in words to fill up the nine-syllable lines and compensate for the misunderstood final *e*, of altering in order to correct what was thought false accent, and the like. Let us remember that even Tyrwhitt (who did more service to Chaucer than almost all other Chaucerians with "weight for age") printed—

A twenty bokes clothed in black or red.

But Tyrwhitt himself began a new order, and the new order (as the "Board School," if not the "Christian" child, and as almost "the grey barbarian" knows) has gone very

far and very fast. The editions of Chaucer now current are constructed[1] with a view of piecing together from this MS. and that, even (where the MSS. will not help) from this printed text and that "critical" text, things that shall comply with the notions as to Middle English grammar, prosody, and pronunciation, which have been excogitated by guesswork, or, if that seem too uncivil, by inferential hypothesis, during the last half century or more. Now in reference to these "critical" texts there is always an irrefutable logical *aporia* lying in wait. Any single MS., however bad, *may* be a copy at first or second-hand, careful or careless, of the original. A blending of two or three or more is less and less likely to represent any actual original at all.

"Critical" editions of the classics and of Middle English.

But it may be said, "This is blasphemy against classical scholarship as well, and you do not intend that, surely?" To which I reply, "Certainly not," though I confess that even in the name of this—the true—"scholarship" things are sometimes done at which a tolerably lachrymose angel would shed floods of tears. But between this and the so-called "scholarship" of philologists in modern languages, and in English perhaps most of all, there are differences of the gravest and the most multiple kinds. That the one is the fruit not of centuries but of millennia of study, mistake, reparation of mistake; and the other a thing scarcely of yesterday, is not very much, though it is something. That, however they may fight about details, there is very general agreement among the classical scholars on important points, and a chaos of discordance among the others, may not be much, though it is a little more. The main and almost hopeless differences are other than these, and infinitely more important. In the first place, we know that nearly all Greek and Roman literature, if not all, was written by persons who were regularly instructed in their own language; that grammar, composition, and prosody

[1] It has been already said that the *Globe*—though it still indulges in those extraordinary family-trees of MSS., which look like diagrams of Euclid that have had bombs thrown into their middles—is less eclectic and "improving" than some others.

formed part of Greek education from a very early time, and were transferred to Rome bodily almost before Roman literature, properly so called, so much as began. That is to say, all the texts we have, including even the redactions of such poets as Homer and Hesiod, were every one written and revised on definite principles—principles recognised, taught, learnt, and therefore beyond all doubt discoverable, with sufficient pains, from the examination of a sufficient number of instances.

Nor is this all. Not only do we know that there was such instruction; that it was given and that it was received; that the results were exposed to pretty sharp grammatical and rhetorical criticism; but we actually possess the documents and the instruments of this criticism and that instruction. We have in Dionysius Thrax for Greek and in Varro (incomplete as he is) for Latin, grammatical treatises representing the earlier part of the century before Christ, when the great period of Latin was just beginning, and when, though the greatest periods of Greek were over, its laws and lessons were only the more jealously preserved, studied, and handed down. We have a mass of documents for both stretching over the whole later period; we have the help of untiring *déblayage*—clearing away of rubbish—on the part of Renaissance scholars; and we have three whole centuries of unremitting attention to the matter, given by some of the acutest minds of Europe, and by a vast body of persons, all of whom have been from their youth trained up in the received and ascertained orthodoxy of the subject.

Now look on the other picture. *There was up to Chaucer's time absolutely no school-instruction even with English as a vehicle, let alone any school-instruction in English itself.* We know from the invaluable and should-be famous passage of his contemporary Trevisa[1] that, until the great alteration of social conditions by the Black Death, English boys learnt Latin and other things at English schools *in and by French.* There is not the

[1] Anybody who wants this may find it in Morris and Skeat's *Specimens*, vol. ii. p. 241.

very faintest spark of evidence that Chaucer ever received the smallest instruction from anybody how to spell an English word, to decline an English noun or verb, to construct an English sentence, or to modulate an English line. It is, on the contrary, about as certain as anything of which we have not positive evidence can be, that he never had anything of the sort, and that his successors for a generation or two never had anything of the sort. The earliest grammatical and rhetorical dealings with English that we have date from the sixteenth century; the earliest prosodic observations from its latter end.

On the one hand, therefore, the classical "scholar's" problem is to discover the positive and doctrinal principles of a body of documents—

I. Which were originally written under such principles ;

II. Which were, in at any rate some cases (not of course in all), transcribed by persons acquainted with, and instructed in, these principles ;

III. Which include formal treatises stating, explaining, and illustrating these principles themselves, and to no small extent coinciding with the period of original writing, to a much larger with that at which the documents were transcribed.

On the other hand, the Middle English "scholar's" problem is to discover the positive and doctrinal principles of a body of documents—

I. Which were written when there is no evidence that any such positive or doctrinal principles existed, and all but a certainty that they did not ;

II. Which were transcribed by persons under the same deprivation or limitation ;

III. Which include no pedagogic treatise dealing with the matter.

I think that to rub this contrast in any further would be an insult to the intelligence of the reader.

But though, while the art and labour of the classical scholar consists in revising documents according to a norm, capable to at least some extent of being independently and authoritatively established, that of the

modern scholar too often consists in extracting from documents a norm according to his own taste and fancy, and then according to his own taste and fancy refashioning the documents in obedience to the norm, not all even of this latter's work is of such a perilous sort. Palæography, though easily abusable, is a real science of a kind, and can refer to outside and independently contributed evidence. Some documents are dated; and the forms in them are dated likewise by real external and internal evidence, not "hariolation." And lastly, in our present department of Chaucer particularly, some scholars have taken the troublous but most thankworthy method of printing the MSS. themselves, of giving us the real property in so far as it exists. A great deal more than we can at all wish is still left to guess on the part of those who like guessing, and to confession of uncertainty on the part of those who do not. But on the whole, we can make out something, and can even say of this something, "'twill serve."

Solid points for discussion. The stanza-forms.

To take, then, those points which have been noticed above in order, there can be no dispute (except mere logomachy) about the general and so to speak *prima facie* metrical character of Chaucer's prosody. You may call a thing an octosyllable, or an iambic dimeter,[1] or a four-beat verse, but the *thing* is the same and unmistakable. So, too, the various stanza-forms are identical under any dress of words, and so is the great staple metre of the *Canterbury Tales*, whether you call it "riding rhyme," or "heroic couplet," or "rhymed decasyllables," or "rhymed five-beat lines," or anything else that the wit or the perversity of man has invented or may invent. Whatever each *libentius audit*, it is *there* —unmistakable, fully constituted, corresponding to things of the same kind written five hundred years after Chaucer

[1] I would fain enter a protest against a practice—common with the compilers of ordinary English grammars and composition-books, and not unknown among those of better breed—of speaking of this line and the next greater as iambic *tetrameters* and *pentameters*. This numeration is quite contrary to the recognised practice of classical prosody, and likely to cause confusion, especially in the use of the word "pentameter."

went to his grave. In each case we shall have a good deal more to say about these forms in the next Interchapter and in the Appendix. For the present they are *data*.

The lines.

Ascending or descending to the next stage, there is matter for more legitimate controversy about the composition of the *lines* which themselves compose these forms. The old and long prevalent idea that Chaucer could not scan was based upon, or rather was but another form of, the idea that he could not count; and this itself, though partly the result of mere ignorance of the value of syllables, especially of the final *e*, had a second cause in the obstinate heresy, finally formulated as orthodoxy by Bysshe, that the syllabic composition of English lines was arithmetically positive and unalterable.

Decapitation or initial monosyllabic foot.

Now, as it happened, Chaucer, the first great named and known poet of English, had, by good luck—though he undoubtedly leant, as we have said, towards the principle of fixity rather than towards the principle of equivalent substitution—handed in evidence, unchallengeable except by ignorance, that he was *not* of this opinion. In regard to his octosyllables there could indeed never have been a mistake about the fact, and it was even very difficult, in face of Milton's adoption of the practice in perhaps his most melodious and certainly his most popular poems, to stigmatise it as improper. It *was* so stigmatised, of course, by the fanatics of syllabic regularity. But the actual presence of seven-syllable lines—set it down as you liked to substitution of trochaic for iambic rhythm, *anacrusis*, monosyllabic feet, "reversal of beat," "omission of thesis," stick on it any earthly or unearthly ticket you pleased—this actual presence remained unmistakable and undeniable, alike as to its existence in great poets, and its enjoyment by well-qualified readers.

That he took the same liberty with the decasyllable (followed, though more sparingly, again by Milton) was for a long time much less clearly perceived, and I believe is still denied or blinked by some people, while it is obvious that the disapproval of it by the neo-classic critics would have been still more severe. For myself, I have

long ceased to have the slightest doubt of the fact, which Professor Skeat has established by an invulnerable array of quotations. It *is* the fact; and what is more, it would be extremely surprising if it were not. The thing had, as we have seen, been usual in the octosyllable for centuries, and it was certain to extend itself to the longer metre, when at last this came to be tried on the great scale. I am, however, far from thinking, despite the mighty authority of its two great practitioners, that it is a desirable licence: and I would have resisted the evidence if I could. Instead of adding beauty, as the companion licence does in the octosyllable, it appears to me to give (with the very rarest exceptions, if with any) an ugly jolt and jar in continuous verse, and complete destruction of all harmony in the stopped couplet. The fact is, as I have ventured to express it already elsewhere, that the octosyllable treads too closely on the heels of the decasyllable to allow the latter to contract its own stride. It may extend with advantage—with very great advantage: but that is a different matter, and to it we may come, just observing that in stanza-work Chaucer is not prone to avail himself of this licence, and for very obvious reasons.[1]

Trisyllabic feet.

The same prejudice which prevented critics and readers in the neo-classic period from observing or, if they observed, allowing Chaucer's cutting the line short would have extended, and did extend, to his lengthening it; and this too is not dead. That there are trisyllabic feet, as I should call them, accented syllables with more than one unaccented between them as I suppose the accent-people would be obliged by their etiquette to put it,[2] I have no more doubt than I have that there are monosyllabic feet or nine-syllable lines. I even think that there are a great many more of them, that they are in fact of constant

[1] The "Lydgatian" monosyllable at the cæsura, which Professor Skeat reluctantly admits as an exception, I reject. The examples given by him are so few that they are fairly dismissible as copyists' mistakes. And I must respectfully protest that the lines in Tennyson's *Vision of Sin*, "Then methought," etc., are no parallel to Chaucer's "acephalous" experiments. Here the metre is dexterously changed, in a solid block or strophe, to trochaic.

[2] Some of them call it "a double thesis."

occurrence. And though this makes for my own general theory, I am rather surprised at it, and am forced to admit that a good many of these feet are of a fairly "squeezable" character. The squeezableness, which is important, may fitly introduce something (to be again and again of course supplemented with something more) on one of the great questions of English prosody.

That question is: When we meet in older English poetry—there is not much controversy about the fact, though there may be some about the law, in regard to the poetry of the nineteenth century—what has just been called a trisyllabic foot, are we to set it down as really such; or to account for it by actual Elision; or to adopt a middle course and set it down to Slur? And let it be observed (to follow the excellent method of Aristotle and of *The Art of Pluck*) that by Trisyllabic Foot I mean a collection of syllables in which full though not necessarily the same value is given to each; by Elision the actual *crushing out* of one so that the foot becomes dissyllabic; and by Slur[1] the compromise which hurries over one syllable, if it does not quite elide it.

Elision and Slur.

Any unfaltering answer to the question, at this our present time of the close of the fourteenth century, is made difficult by a certain peculiarity of spelling which pervades (though by no means consistently) the MSS. and the early printed editions from the close of the fifteenth till late into the sixteenth. These writers and printers did not use the ugly apostrophe, which invaded English books in the seventeenth century, and persevered into the eighteenth, under the influence of a definite theory of scansion, which in turn it undoubtedly strengthened. But they did run the two words together in the case of articles, prepositions, and sometimes even pronouns. Just as we find in Wyatt and Surrey "tembrace" and the like, so, a hundred years earlier, we find in Chaucer some-

[1] I have, as will have been sufficiently evident, no objection to, but a great liking for, classical terms when they are necessary or even convenient. But with so excellent an English word as "slur," which exactly expresses the English practice, I can see no excuse for *Synizesis*.

times (not always) "thestat," "tharray," etc., and even "in thalyghte" for "in *thee* alyghte." Now is this also a matter of theory—a sprout of the idea that the three syllables *ought to be two*? Or does it express a real custom of pronunciation? Were these two words—not merely the first, which might be and in some MSS. is, "the state," but "tharray" where there is no way out of the difficulty—so pronounced?

I do not believe they ever were; but even from my point this by no means settles the question. I do not, in the same way, believe that a man ever let such a monster pass the door of his lips as "monstrorrendinformingens," but I feel sure that Virgil *scanned* "monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens," so. Was there anything similar in Chaucer or was there not?

The arguments for Elision are, first, the spelling; secondly, the undoubted belief of generations, not so far from Chaucer's own time, that there *was* elision; thirdly, the fact that it exists abundantly and obtrusively, one may say, in the two *grammaticæ*, the two accomplished literary languages, Latin and French, which Chaucer and others knew.

The arguments for Slur are, first, the usual ones for any compromise; secondly, that even unquestionable trisyllabic feet are undoubtedly pronounced somewhat quicker than dissyllabic; thirdly, that English is notoriously addicted to slurring and clipping in pronunciation, from the extreme cases of Chiselhampton and Cirencester and Cockburnspath to the lesser ones of Southwell and Southwark.

Trisyllabics proper.

Those for actual trisyllabic feet may seem weaker at first, but to me they become stronger and stronger the more they are considered. One which is, to me, almost sufficient, is purely historic, and so in reality, if not in appearance, the most solid possible. It is drawn from the earliness and the persistence of the undisputed trisyllabic foot in English. Nobody denies the presence in Anglo-Saxon of groups of syllables which would naturally, if not necessarily, pass into it when metre was substituted for mere

rhythm. Its presence in *Genesis and Exodus* (if not even earlier) and other poems of the mid-thirteenth century is undeniable. In all folk-song and ballad-writing it perseveres, while the persistent and ferocious persecution of it, and the critical disapproval of it, for two hundred years and more, cannot drown it or burn it or bury it. Earth and water and fire may combine against it, but it abides victoriously in the air, the element of poetry, and descends again at the right time.

The second is more controversial, but to me quite satisfactory. It is only by means of this mixture of trisyllabic feet that the extraordinary variety and charm of English poetry—a thing acknowledged by those who are not Englishmen as well as by those who are—can be attained; and it has been almost invariably by those who used them most that the attainment has been most successful and complete. Nay more, just as it has been said of the Jews in Spain, and of other persecuted races and families elsewhere, that by changing names they avoided the persecution directed against them, so the trisyllabic foot survives at the very time when it seems to have disappeared in folk-song and theatrical verse. The Bysshes, and even the Johnsons, cannot prevent persons with an ear from reading the apostrophe *with* the syllable it has vainly tried to expel, and giving value to the *i* and *y* syllables to which they impotently refuse value. Such a captain of the heathen or heretic host as Pope himself selects a line[1] which derives most of its beauty from a trisyllabic foot, as his own favourite among his own productions: and Shenstone,[2] forty years at least before Coleridge, vindicates the "dactyl" in English poetry.

Alexandrines.

Another point of no inconsiderable interest in connection with the length of Chaucer's lines opens the question, "Did he ever use the Alexandrine, or line of normally twelve syllables?" I think he did, as in the examples given below, and I am not much affected by the general failure to take this view, with its consequent adjustments

[1] "The freezing Tanais through a waste of snows."
[2] In the *Essays*.

by syncope or elision or other devices. For, in the first place, it matters to the theories of those who deny that they should deny it; and it does not matter to my theory at all that I should assert it. Secondly, the lines —or some of them—scan much better as Alexandrines. Thirdly, it is reasonable that in the process of "separation from the heap" this form also should be tried, especially considering the great prominence of it in French poetry, which was always more or less a model. Fourthly, we see historically that there is—at least up to Dryden and sometimes since—a constant tendency to take the Alexandrines as an "easement," now and then, to the decasyllable.[1]

[1] We shall trace the further use of this line—venerable from its achievements in Greek and French—later; but it may not be improper to say at once that it seems to me *only* an easement, not a staple, in English. I think it may be well here to give specimens, not only of it, but of the other anomalous or debated lines just mentioned.

Alexandrines:—

Westward, | right swich | ano|ther in | the op|posit; *K. T.* 1036.

where, of course, those who like may scan—

Westward, | right swich | anoth|'r in thop|posit,

if they will, though no MS. is quoted for the contraction.

Others are in some of the places (*W. of B. T.* 231; *F. T.* 158, 286; *Som. T.* 462) where they wish to pronounce *benedicite* "bendisty" or "bencity," in spite of the fact that it must have the full five-syllable value in *K. T.* 927. See also *Sq. T.* 20, 75, 480, 515-16.

Acephalous lines:—

Passim: the well-known one cited above from the *Prologue* and usually mended—

Twen|ty bo|kes clad | in blak | and reed,

with

And | a cok|kow sit|ting on | hir hand, *K. T.* 1072.

will do well enough.

As for the Lydgatian "breakback," the examples quoted by those who believe in it are such as—

My tale is doon for my wit is thinne, *M. T.* 438.

and

I mean of Mark, Mathew, Luke, and John. *Prol. Mel.* 33.

For my own part, I am perfectly certain that Chaucer's prosodic wit was never so thin, and his ear never so thick, as to write the first; while in the second, Marke is admittedly possible, and supported by MS. and early print; while both are easily mended with syllables that copyists were quite likely to slip, especially when Lydgate himself had misled them.

Syllable-values.

We come now to yet another point of great importance, the question how Chaucer manages the individual syllabic values which make up his feet or his accent-groups.[1] In the great majority of words this "accent" is mainly, though not wholly, identical with that of the present day, and it is not necessary for any decently-bred modern Englishman who is acquainted with that *secret de Polichinelle*, the value of the final *e*, to accept any unfamiliar pronunciation in order to get the full metrical and rhythmical value of Chaucer's lines. Whether the vowels were then differently pronounced or not I do not know; there is practically no evidence on the subject of any kind that I can admit. But it is certain that if the *actual* sound has changed, the *relative* values of the different sounds have not. Where we should expect a long vowel before a single consonant we find it, and we often find that where a short vowel sound comes before two consonants it can take the place of a long, though not invariably. The really and constantly short vowels of modern English are, as a rule, short also, unless some special stress be laid on them. These are rules; but to them we find two considerable classes of exceptions, which have mainly become obsolete in English. One of these concerns proper, especially classical proper, names, the other words in which the French accent is retained.

It is, indeed, not at all improbable that these two classes are really, at least in origin, one. The peculiarity of French accentuation, or rather the dogma of it, is well known, and Professor Ker, among others, has rightly drawn attention[2] to the very peculiarly pronounced values which French, like Low Latin, gives to Latin words. It is obvious that Chaucer follows the same system, and that he is followed by all English poets

[1] I must, I am afraid, repeat once more that I entirely exclude the previous or subsequent question as to the *cause* of this value, whatever it is. I shall only say that Chaucer is one of the main sources of evidence in favour of the position that, whether there is quantity in English, or no quantity but only accent, accent is certainly one of the main agencies in English for the creation of the thing which *I* call quantity.

[2] In the *Dark Ages*, as quoted elsewhere.

down at least to Spenser, who was a very fair scholar in the classical languages. Milton is about the first to give the correct quantification. Earlier writers not only shorten naturally long vowels and lengthen short, but even make a cretic out of *Minerva*, as Baudelaire does out of *Francisca*.

More indubitably, though I think not more really French is the constant valuation of such words as "manèr," "entraìl," etc., according to their French rather than their English value.

Rhyme.

And so we come to one of the hottest of the ash-places, the question of rhyme, on which, however, I do not propose to say much. Although I absolutely refuse to accept the *y-ye* test, as in the very slightest degree valid for establishing authenticity, until the Bradshavians give up *Sir Thopas*, I believe that Chaucer probably avoided these rhymes, just as a modern English poet with delicate ear avoids the rhyme of "or" and "ore."[1] Otherwise, and with the large exception of that freedom of shifting the accent which has just been noticed, and which enables him to make a rhyme of "squire" and "supper" ("squyèr" and "sopèr"), his rhymes are for the most part quite modern and normal. Many of them are, of course, double rhymes, thanks to the *e*. But I have always thought that the excision of this exuberance, or excrescence, which was certainly going on in Chaucer's own time, was probably much helped by the popularity of "riding rhyme" in which the doubling is rarely if ever good, save to produce special and exceptional effects. It is scarcely necessary to say that, in common with all poets up to at least the middle of the seventeenth century, he avails himself of the full syllabic value of words in *-ion* and similar endings; or that, though the modern utter abhorrence of an identical rhyme, even with changed sense, does not appear in him, he is not very prone to indulgence in it.

[1] He does it only when he cannot help it, or can help it at such an expense that the game is not worth the candle; but he does not regard it as he regards a rhyme of "Leonora" and "before her," or of "Helen" and "willing."

NOTE ON CHAUCERIANA

ACCORDING to my promise I have excluded from the text those pieces which, doubtful to almost all, are thought by some to be certainly spurious. (I am not, of course, speaking of those which undoubtedly belong to Lydgate or others.) The two most beautiful and (poetically) most Chaucerian of these, *The Court of Love* and *The Flower and the Leaf*, are in rhyme-royal, as are *The Assembly of Ladies* and some others. The *Plowman's Tale* is in eights of eight, alternately rhymed; *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (such a different one from Keats's!) is partly rhyme-royal, partly octaves of the *ababbcbc* type. *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* (a nice thing, whether explicitly Clanvowe or not) is in an interesting decasyllabic quintet, *aabba*, of good capabilities. The extremely curious *Tale of Beryn*, with its vivid Prologue (neither of them in the least Chaucerian, for all their merits), is in *Gamelyn* metre, somewhat lengthened and doggerellised.

CHAPTER V

LANGLAND AND OTHER ALLITERATIVES

Piers Plowman—Its general character—The verse compared with Anglo-Saxon—With Layamon—Its intrinsic values: Structure—Alliteration—Rhymelessness—Quality of the lines—Qualifications of the rhythm—Other alliterative poems *c.* 1400.

Piers Plowman.

WE have now to turn to the Titan of the late fourteenth-century battle between the older and the newer schools of English prosody, to the author, whoever he was—we call him "Langland" merely for shortness, and without the faintest intention of prejudging a debate which is out of our sphere—of the *Vision of Piers Plowman* and, with the same provision, of *Richard the Redeless*.[1]

Its general character.

It is not so necessary now as it would have been but a few (as history counts few) years ago to enter a protest against the notion of Langland as presenting a much more archaic state of English than Chaucer, but it is still rather necessary. He was almost certainly, though he may have been a slightly older man in years than Chaucer, a pretty exact literary contemporary both of the author of the *Canterbury Tales* and of the author of the *Confessio Amantis*. And it has been proved, to all but uttermost philological as well as literary satisfaction, that he is by no means less copious in French *words* than the former, though he certainly is less addicted to French *forms* than

[1] Professor Skeat's Clarendon Press edition (2 vols., Oxford, 1886) is of course the standard. But Wright's, in the *Library of Old Authors* (though printed in half lines), is more convenient for holding and reading, the presence of three different texts on the same page in Professor Skeat's being exceedingly distracting. (His E.E.T.S. ed. avoids this, however.) Whitaker's, the first and only edition of the "C" text without A or B, is now merely a curiosity; and the chief "C" *additions* are printed in Wright's notes.

the latter, and uses dialectic and now obsolete English words more freely than either. But his subjects, which are either local, or abstract, or both, give him a greater *look* of strangeness than either Chaucer or Gower wears, and this look is emphasised still more decidedly by the point in him with which alone we have here to do—his metre.

The verse compared with Anglo-Saxon.

Comparing Langland [1] with Anglo-Saxon verse, we find in him a much greater *regularity*. This is not merely observable in the lengths of the lines, which exhibit nothing in the least resembling the astonishing variations of Anglo-Saxon,[2] but in the uniformity of the alliteration and the correspondence of the hemistichs. Langland is deliberately, though, as we shall see, not always successfully, avoiding the new metrical scansion; but either deliberately in order to vie with it, or unconsciously in consequence of familiarity with it, he adopts, to a very large extent, its great feature of correspondence within the lines and between them. Further, the correspond-

[1] For an extract let us take nothing more out of the way than the first score of lines in the first version—

In A somer sesun · whon softe was the sonne,
I schop me in-to a schroud · A scheep as I were;
In Habite of an Hermite · vn-holy of werkes,
Wende I wydene in this world · wondres to here.
Bote in a Mayes Morwynge · on Maluerne hulles
Me bi-fel a ferly · A Feyrie, me thouhte;
I was weori of wandringe · and wente me to reste
Undur a brod banke · bi a Bourne syde,
And as I lay and leonede · and lokede on the watres,
I slumberde in A slepyng · hit sownede so murie.
Thenne gon I Meeten · A Meruelous sweuene,
That I was in a Wildernesse · wuste I neuer where,
And as I beo-heold in-to the Est · an-heigh to the sonne,
I sauh a Tour on a Toft · triyely I-maket;
A Deop Dale bi-neothe · A dungun ther-Inne,
With deop dich and derk · and dredful of siht.
A Feir feld ful of folk · fond I ther bi-twene,
Of alle maner of men · the mene and the riche,
Worchinge and wondringe · as the world asketh.
Summe putten hem to the plough · & pleiden hem ful seldene,
In Eringe and in Sowynge · swonken ful harde
That monie of theos wasturs · In Glotonye distruen.

[2] This is an old cause of difference. But it is enough for me to open Grein-Wülker in the manner of sortilege, and find at once, say, a line of 16 syllables followed by a line of 9, or turn, less at random, to the passages of *Genesis*, where blocks, of a score or more each, alternate with batches of half a score and less. Nor does distinction of "extended" and unextended lines seem to me to alter the *fact* at all.

ence results in a general note which is still more different from that of Anglo-Saxon. This latter, as we said, where it gives us any rhythm that we can recognise at all, gives us a trochaic one—of a staccato and "dribbling" character, no doubt, but still trochaic. Langland, too, is trochaic sometimes, but he constantly blends the "double time" with, and often passes from it into, "triple time," the time, as we call it, of the anapæst.

With Layamon.

Compared with Layamon, on the other hand, we note at first also increased regularity, but a regularity of quite a different kind. The author of the *Brut* is like a teetotum staggering against different objects in his way. It is to me, after reading him over and over again, distinctly uncertain whether he meant to write old alliterative verse and was unable to do so, or whether he meant to write new octosyllabic couplets and was unable to do so, in either case with any continuous regularity. But it is very certain that he oftener achieves a fairish couplet than a good alliterative stave, and that, when he does come near to the newer rhythm, he is distinctly iambic, not trochaic or anapæstic. Now Langland, with his advantage of nearly two centuries, is not in this quandary. He knows the new metre probably quite well enough to have written it had he chosen, certainly quite well enough (which is perhaps even a higher degree) to avoid falling into it constantly when he does not choose, though its irresistibleness traps him now and then.[1]

Turn now to the consideration of the thing itself as a rhythmical vehicle and verse-form. We could hardly have a better example of it, for Langland is certainly the person of greatest genius (except Dunbar) who has handled it: and though he has no passage of the same concentrated union of vigour and grace as *The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo*, he has of necessity much greater range and variety, as well as more intenseness.

The general structure and effect of the verse are clear

[1] I do not know that it is necessary to contrast him very minutely with the authors of *William of Palerne* and *Cleanness*, the latter of whom was perhaps his older contemporary, and the former his not much older predecessor. He shortens the line, as it seems to me, more than either.

Its intrinsic values—structure.

enough. Perhaps the first essential, and certainly the first striking, characteristic, is the constitution of the verse itself as a pair of sharply separated halves which never on any consideration run syllabically into each other, and are much more often than not divided by an actual "stop," if only a brief one, of sense. Their separation is so absolute and unvarying that it induced Guest to found on it an Athanasian system of cæsura in later English poetry, and that, for a considerable time after the revival of the study of Old and Middle English, it was usual to print the halves in successive lines. This, I feel sure, is a mistake; for, in emphasising the fact of the separation, it obscures that of the combination which undoubtedly exists, not merely in virtue of the alliteration (to which we shall come immediately) but as a matter of rhythmical effect on the ear. This effect is not complete, nor can it receive due realisation in the successive units, until the double half-line is concluded. It may be said that the arrangement is merely mechanical, and can make no difference; but it does, as any one whose eye and ear are well enough fitted naturally, and well enough trained artificially, will soon discover, in reading the same passage in Wright and Skeat respectively.[1]

Alliteration.

The second most obvious characteristic is the alliteration. The orthodox dose of this is two alliterated syllables in the first hemistich—which is usually a little the longer—and one in the second. Professor Skeat thinks that fourth, and, I suppose, still more fifth, alliterations are accidental, or at any rate not sought after; but I am not so sure of this, and it is quite certain that in Langland's successors this overdosing (as with other drugs) is frequent and

[1] I hope it is not impertinent or pedantic once more to recommend strongly this joint eye-and-ear reading. It does not at all interfere with the understanding of the sense or the enjoyment of the poetry, and it puts the mind in a condition to understand the virtue and the meaning of the prosody as nothing else can. One of the innumerable privileges of those who have received the older classical education is that they have been taught (in at least some cases) to read scanningly. I have accustomed myself for years to read Middle English, like *all* English, poetry in the same way; and any one who does so will find that very soon the final *e*, and the libertine accents, and the rest cease to jar, and the whole thing goes, in good examples, as fluently as Pope or Tennyson.

deliberate. But three, which is the old Anglo-Saxon ration, is no doubt sufficient to give to the line the peculiar "bind" which, in the absence of definite metre, and the still more glaring absence of rhyme, it requires.

Rhymeless-ness.

The third is this absence of rhyme itself—an absence which, as we have seen, is by no means characteristic of all alliterative poetry, but which in Langland is so complete and striking that it is impossible not to believe it designed. I mean not merely that the poet deliberately selected a form where rhyme is unnecessary, but that he would not have it even if it were accidental. He might have read Layamon,[1] and have made up his mind not to fall into the pit of rhyme as Layamon did, so rare is the presence of even assonanced syllables at the ends of the double lines, between the halves of the same line, or between the first halves of two succeeding ones. I fancy (it may be only fancy) that it is least rare, rare as it is, in the last case.[2] And what is more remarkable still, the whole run and fall of the rhythm is so arranged that the ear does not in the least expect or call for rhyme —that it would hardly even notice it if imperfect rhyme were there. This is mainly brought about by the great prevalence of "falling" rhythm, notwithstanding the anapæstic tendency already noticed. Both hemistichs, as a rule, end trochaically, an effect rendered easy of production by the abundance of final *e*'s and other suffixes.[3]

[1] Humanity being what it is, it may be well to say that I have not the least idea that he *did*. It is odd, however, that, as one story has it, he was born at Cleobury Mortimer, and that another makes Layamon priest of Arley-on-Severn; for the well-girt man can walk from one place to the other in an hour and a half, and there is an L in both poets' names.

[2] *Identical* rhymes at this place are rather frequent than not, owing to Langland's love for parallelism, *e.g.* C xiii. 65, 66—

> Ac Reson shal rekene *with hym* · and rebuke him atte laste,
> And Conscience a-counte *with hym* · and caste him in arerages.

But these hardly count.

[3] There is no contradiction, as the hasty and those unused to *res metrica* may imagine. The addition of a syllable to two anapæsts or anapæst-equivalents gives the trochaic ending *considered separately*. But I ought to mention that Langland very frequently suggests that doubtful foot (of which much more, I hope, later), the amphibrach—

> ĭ̆ shōp(e) : mĕ | ĭn shrōū : dĕs | ăs ī̆ : ă | sheep were ; :

though, as elsewhere, *when the whole line is taken*, it becomes merely anapæstic (*δυνάμει*, if not to Langland), as the dotted bars show.

A fifth obvious characteristic (already glanced at) as the eye looks down the page, is that there is, though very far from an absolute, a very considerable equality of length in the lines. Thirteen syllables is, I take it after repeated samplings, a fair average length of line: and the very great majority are not shorter than twelve nor longer than fourteen, though there is a still greater range between longest and shortest. So, again, as a sixth, the first hemistich is generally rather longer than the second; though, again, there are plenty of exceptions. But on the whole the unity of effect, when once the combined instrument of eye and ear, above spoken of, has been properly tuned to receive and give it, is very remarkable indeed, and shows that the measure is no mere patchwork unnaturally stuck together, but, such as it is, a real and living rhythmical organism.

Quality of the lines.

At the same time, for all its own idiosyncrasy, and for all the practised and (one may not vainly think) jealous skill of its artist, it cannot entirely resist the tyrannous "suck" of the metrical whirlpool. Examples of almost all the staple lines which English poetry had developed or was to develop in its natural evolution, and against this wilful reaction, are to be found with very little searching.

At A vi. 2—

To seche that seint in selcouthe londis;

we have, with the imminent changes which are so freely scented in the *Piers Plowman* MSS., and even in the three versions themselves,

And seek that saint in selcouth lands,

a perfect octosyllabic or iambic dimeter.

The decasyllable, naturally, is far commoner. We meet one at the forty-third line of the Prologue itself, where the very stave-split becomes a normal cæsura—

In glotonye, God wot, gon heo to bedde.

The Alexandrine, from its nearness to the average length of Langland's line, is commoner still. With the

dissyllabic value of "tour," which was so soon to come, we get a perfect one in i. 12—

> This tour and this toft, quod heo, treuthe is ther-inne.

And almost equally, perhaps more, common is the fourteener, become a speciality already in English metre, of which we meet two examples close together early in the First Book—

> That dungun in that deope dale that dredful is of siht,

and

> That is the Castel of Care [quod heo] whoso cometh therinne,[1]

while the Orm metre or *fif*teener shows itself in this last, and wherever the last word has a feminine ending.

But these instances are produced, not to show what Langland was trying to do, but what he sometimes (with all his skill and all his pains) could not help doing. It is on the normal forms of the line, as analysed above, that we must base our judgment of it as a rhythmical medium of verse.

Qualifications of the rhythm.

We find in it the following merits and qualifications— for the demerits and disqualifications the survey of the whole achievement of English prosody up to 1400, in the Interchapter, will be a more proper position. In the first place, though of course deliberately and obstinately refusing to the ear the charms of metre and rhyme, it really has something to offer instead. More than a hundred years ago — to say nothing of Percy, a pioneer to whose sagacity here, as elsewhere, full justice has perhaps never yet been done—though Ellis failed to perceive, Mitford had no difficulty in perceiving, that there is real music in *Piers Plowman*. His ingenious experiment[2] of tagging a batch of lines with rhyme, so as to bring them into Tusserian form, perhaps "doctors" the balance too much, but it is valid in a way. There *is* music in this

[1] This line is very noteworthy, because the comparison of the three versions shows, almost without a doubt, that Langland perceived the metrical effect, and deliberately altered it by omitting "quod heo" (which appears in A) in B and C.

[2] *Harmony of Language*, ed. ii. p. 158.

*un*metre; and, what is more, the music is neither unpleasant nor monotonous. For the two purposes for which Langland himself almost exclusively uses it—narrative including description, and argument including exposition—it is by no means ill-fitted, and it is a very tolerable instrument of dialogue. The alliteration is not unfrequently a real set-off, and no mean one. English poetry, when it has been most itself, has always loved alliteration as a staff, though it may not have been wise to use it as a crutch. One particular device, quaint but most effective, is the employment of proper and personal names[1] instead of mere class-words or generalities.

Other alliterative poems *c.* 1400.

In short, the process of actual reading, with that attention to scansion which has been recommended, will —after a sort, and to a certain degree—justify this curious reaction. As an exception, a curiosity, a "sport," "Not guilty, but don't do it again," may be, with a quite sufficient seriousness, the verdict. It will scarcely, after this examination of *Piers Plowman*, be necessary to give one of equal minuteness to the other poems which may with more or less certainty, probability, or possibility, be referred to the fourteenth century or the very beginning of the fifteenth, and which are written in the alliterative form. The admitted *Richard the Redeless* and the excluded *Piers Plowman's Creed*[2] are written with such exactness in the same measure with *Piers* itself, that this measure is a main warrant for the one, and requires to be overbalanced by very strong internal evidence to justify disqualification in the other. The romances in the form —the Thornton *Morte d'Arthure*, the *Destruction of Troy*, the alliterative *Alexander* poems—incline rather to the model which we have discussed in speaking of *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *William of Palerne*, especially of the latter; that is to say, there is slightly less variety and idiosyncrasy about them, they *spring* less and *undulate* more. All

[1] "Rose the regrater," "Beat Bettris,"
"And [robbed] Margaret of her maidenhead,"

where Rose and Beatrice and Margaret swiftly appear and disappear in the single allusions.

[2] For the *Plowman's Tale*, which is in metre, see p. 178.

are more or less Northern; all have been, by this man and that, added to the huge hypothetical baggage, which, according to a favourite trick of modern scholars, has been heaped on that rather hypothetical person and very hypothetical Scot, "Huchowne of the Awle Ryale." But no one of them requires much individual notice.[1] As for

[1] All are in the E.E.T.S. series. In reading them more than once I have imagined that I observed more rhythmical character in *Alexander and Dindimus* than in the companion pieces on the same subject; a particular monotony and tendency to repetition in the *Destruction*; most vigour, with longer lines and a slight overdose of alliteration, in the *Morte*. (These judgments, it may be necessary to observe, are strictly confined to the *prosodic* features of the pieces.) A short specimen of each may be appended—

> But whan the watur with the wind · the wawus upcasteth,
> And thouh hit turne any time · to tempest of windus,
> Hit ne a-wecheth no wawe · nor no watur rereth,
> As hit amongus you men · is many time founde
> That stiue stormus of the wind · stiren up the wawus.
> But here, whan the wind hath · his hugeste blastus,
> The clere watur he bi-clipth · and closeth hit inne.
>
> *Alexander and Dindimus*, 483-489.

> A! fonnet folke, why fare ye thus now,
> With solas full sore, and sanges of myrthe,
> At the weddyng of the weghes, that shall to wo turne?
> With hardlayke and harme, that happyn shall after,
> Ye dowtles mun degh, for dedes of tho two;
> And your fryndes full fey fallyn to ground,
> Your sonys be slayne in sight of your ene;
> Your husbandes hewen with hondys in pesis,
> Wyues made wedowys, and wayling for euer.
>
> Cassandra on the Wedding of Paris and Helen,
> *Destruction of Troy*, vii. 3473-81.

> Grefe the noghte, Gaynour, fore Godes lufe of hewene,
> Ne gruche noghte my ganggynge, it salle to gude turne!
> Thy wonrydez and thy wepynge woundez myne herte,
> I may noghte wit of this woo, for alle this werlde ryche;
> I have made a kepare, a knyghte of thyne awene,
> Overlynge of Ynglande undyre thy selvene,
> And that es Syr Mordrede, that thow has mekylle praysede,
> Salle be thy dictour, my dere, to doo whatte the lykes.
>
> Thornton *Morte*, 705-712.

To these and the Langland passage it does not seem necessary to add others, though the vigorous little *Chivaler Assigne* (in which the laity may be excused for not at first recognising "The Knight of the Swan") is notable for the frequent shortness of the lines, and especially of the first halves. I do not think there is an alliterative poem in print that I have not read, and I find them generally quite agreeable reading; but their prosodic variations are not great, though the alliteration sometimes distributes itself differently. It may be added, that the different modes of indicating the middle break are kept designedly for the benefit of the reader.

the rest of the said baggage, and some Scots poems which, though even more out of the question as regards any possible "Huchowne," rank with it in another way, but are in alliterative rhymed *stanza*, not in plain continuous alliteration—they have been referred to in the note on p. 111. Dunbar is necessarily reserved for the next Book.

INTERCHAPTER II

THE survey of the prosodic character of English poetry, certainly or probably of the fourteenth century, may, from some points of view, be inferior in importance to that which we had to undertake in the previous Interchapter. There is no doubt, at least in the present writer's mind, that by the year 1300 the fate and the fortune of English prosody were finally constituted and fixed.

But the products of that early period are comparatively, though only comparatively, scanty, and (ignoble as some high-flying partisans may pronounce the allowance of such an objection) they are of such a character that only the real or enforced student, or that, it may be feared, still rarer person the thorough lover of literature, is ever likely to take much cognisance of them. We cannot rationally expect, however much we may desire, that it should ever be otherwise with the majority of even tolerably well-educated readers.

With the products of the century to which this Book has been devoted it is, perhaps (a very small part of them excepted), not very different actually; but their state is more gracious potentially, and as matter of quality and desert. They are extremely abundant; their variety does not fall short of their abundance; a great deal of them is actually delightful as reading, as pastime; not a little of this is of very high excellence; and not a little of that little has the unbroken, if not always the unattacked, prestige of five hundred years to its credit. Even yet there is a great deal to be done before fourteenth-century English poetry is or can be known as it deserves to be; but

there is no impossibility that it may become so, not, indeed, in our time, but partly by our time's efforts.

The contents may be classified in various ways with reference to prosody, as well as in others which have little or no reference thereto. Of the first class the most important classification is, no doubt, into metrical and alliterative, with the bridge or middle term of alliterative-metrical. This deserves attention first by itself, and as such; afterwards with reference to the characteristics of the several subdivisions.

Of the fact of the main division there is no question. I am afraid I must repeat the opinion that enquiry into its history must be almost entirely speculative, and enquiry into its probable causes hardly less so. Wright, indeed, in his Introduction to *Piers Plowman*, thought that we could "trace this history with tolerable certainty" (p. xxviii. 2nd ed.), but he had to fall back, in order to establish continuity between 1250 and 1350, on the much less confident statement—"there appears little room for doubting that, during the whole of this time, the pure alliterative poetry was in use among the lower classes of society." Despite our much greater advantages, there are not many now living who know the poetry of this period, with combined linguistic and literary knowledge, better than Wright did. Yet it is remarkable that he quotes no examples, and the consideration just advanced makes it certain that, if there were any, he would probably have known and must have quoted them. I can only say that if any one will supply me with examples of pure alliterative verse, certainly or even probably dating between 1200 and 1325, if not even 1350, I shall be very much obliged to him, and will reform my plan accordingly.

In default of such evidence,[1] I can see no logical

[1] Professor Skeat in the excellent Essay on Alliterative Verse which he contributed to Drs. Hales' and Furnivall's *Percy MS.* nearly forty years ago produced none, and has never, I think, since produced any; nor, so far as I am aware, has any one else, though there is a strange reluctance to admit the lesson. It is even sometimes urged that "so many books were lost." This reminds me of the celebrated councillors who said, "There are so many accidents: and it needs only one to save us!" I shall be very glad to welcome the accident when it comes; meanwhile I stick to the facts. *Vide* pp. 100 and 126, *sup.*

alternative to the supposition that the process which we see beginning at 1200 with a half-compromise, half-battle between alliterative rhythm and rhymed metre, and continuing, always with the latter on the winning hand, during the early thirteenth, caused the complete, or almost complete, "diving under" of the former towards the middle of that century, and that it only "dived up" again not so very early in the next. The reasons of its resurrection are probably extra-literary, or literary only by relation. They may, as Wright thought, have been in a sense "political"—an obscure reaction of nationalist and democratic movement, opposing foreign or semi-foreign culture and institutions of all kinds. They may—and there is one of the rare real pieces of evidence for this in Chaucer's well-known and often-quoted reference—be mainly local, and connected with the release of the northern and north-western counties from devastation and barbarism. And, in close connection with this, they may have had something to do with the great religious literary movement started in these same northern counties by Richard Rolle of Hampole. Some of these causes, or all, or none, with or without others not mentioned, may have been at work. But we are only busied with the result—the result that does not meet us for the best part of a century, and does meet us now.

It deserves attention alike because of its curiosity and because of its failure. It is only a loop or backwater in the stream of English poetry—an unsuccessful attempt at reactionary rebellion. But it produced some good work; it had, though it did not live, some good effects, and left practically no bad ones after it. And it *is* very curious.

We have done, and shall do, justice to its merits; it will suffice in this place, only recapitulating those which belong to the general and permanent course of the history of English poetry, to turn to its defects. It was undoubtedly invaluable as a protest—kept up until still more valuable protestants, in the shape of the ballad, the altered drama, and other things, were at hand to take it

up—against the imposition of absolute syllabic uniformity on English, and against the tyranny of the iamb. Nor was it useless in giving refuge to archaic and provincial words, some of which might be, and were, of real poetic value. But though it did these services to the two great branches of prosody—versification and diction—more or less directly, it did directly very decided *dis*services. In the first place, what we call "structural alliteration," as distinguished from that ornamental alliteration which is one of the greatest resources of the English poet, necessarily and inevitably tends towards the employment of words, not for their sense, nor for their beauty, nor for their real qualities of any kind, except the very trivial one of beginning with the right letter.[1] And, in the second place, it tends to aggravate itself until we get to the senseless and tasteless stuffings of the line with five or even six alliterated words.

Moreover, even in Langland we see the great defect of structural-alliterative—the defect which had broken it up once before, and was to break it up again. For the ear once accustomed to the sweetness of rhyme, to the variety and versatility of stanza, to the charm of metrical rhythm, its poetical equipment must necessarily seem exceeding poor and beggarly. The very trochaic or anapæstic rhythm with which it is wont to clothe itself expresses a sense of the *need* of some extra-allurement, of something to differentiate it from prose. Yet one has regretfully to pronounce the device insufficient. Large tracts of all the poems except *Piers Plowman*, and perhaps some places there, almost fall back into prose, with a certain recitative roll—prose less musical and less agreeable than the actual prose rhythm of Aelfric himself. The drawback, observable to some extent even in metrical poetry during the Middle Ages, that the sense is too much bound to the line and the line to the sense,

[1] Some people, I believe, are able to disguise the triviality by calling alliteration "head-rhyme." No matter what the authority for this term, it has always seemed to me self-contradictory. The essence of rhyme is identity of *vowel-sound*. The vowel is the body *and* the soul: consonants are only "coats and hosen and hats." And see above, p. 111.

is particularly noticeable in alliterative verses. They often admit vigour; they seldom accommodate grace. That their idiosyncrasy makes all but distinctly gifted poets intolerable may not be an unmitigated disadvantage; that it provides even such poets with a lyre of but one string is a disadvantage without mitigation of any kind.

On the whole, therefore, and not retracting anything that has been allowed on the other side, there *is* a certain excuse for those writers before the nineteenth century who, having no special knowledge of Middle English, failed to detect poetical value in Langland. It would be rather interesting—though, in consequence of the wide spread of smattering, difficult—to take a person, otherwise fairly well-educated but who had never heard of *Piers Plowman* or its metre, and to give him a considerable passage printed as prose and without the middle mark. No doubt any one with a good ear would, after a time, detect a certain rough cadence, then a system of divisions, and after that a certain harmony in this parallelism. But perhaps even in this case these discoveries would not be immediate, and a dull person with a blunt ear would probably never make them at all.

Whatever might be said later about the "barbarousness," the "non-naturalness," the "puerility," and so forth, of rhyme, its rival clearly had nothing, and less than nothing, to oppose to the application of similar epithets to its proceedings. That alliteration is in itself not an uncaressing thing to an English ear may be most cheerfully admitted. The proscription of it at certain times has always been a mistake, and has sometimes been directly associated with the falsest and most mischievous heresies in English prosody generally. But it had already, centuries before, proved itself unequal to the task of supporting alone (or with the help of accent) the burden of a system of versification, and it was now making the same confession by resorting constantly, if not invariably, to an alliance with the very rhyme, the very foot-scansion, the very stanza-arrangement, which it might seem bound to repudiate. In that alliance, when

it was reduced to its proper functions, it was destined to keep a lasting hold on English, and many of the finest schemes, for instance, of Mr. Swinburne's verse are almost as conspicuously alliterative as they are metrical and symphonic. But by itself, not Langland, at one time in pure English, nor Dunbar, at a later in the palmiest days of Scots, could make it a safe and sufficient, much less a permanent, prosodic vehicle.

Very much more must be said as to the larger division of rhymed poetry—the Established Church then, now, and, let us hope, always, of our prosodic polity. It exhibits no slavish or tedious uniformity of characteristic, but ranges from the *Tale of Gamelyn*,[1] where the alliterative scheme takes on the easiest but not the least engaging *undress* of rhyme and regular metrical rhythm, through elaborately artificial compromises between the two systems, like *The Pearl*, to the frankly and, in one case, rather limitedly metrical-rhymed systems of Chaucer and Gower. Its *copia* is magnificent: there is the great body of the English Romances; the other great body of sacred poems and treatises in verse; not a little verse-chronicle; the beginnings beyond all doubt, though we shall for reasons take them in detail later, of drama; not a little lyric proper; the whole works of Chaucer and the English of Gower, with, as an appendix (also to be handled in detail later for convenience' sake), the beginnings of specially Scottish poetry. This is, indeed, as Miss Austen observes of the provision which Isabella Thorp thought inadequate, "no niggardly assignment."

It is certainly no uninteresting one from any point of view, and least of all from ours. For its lessons, manifold as they are, are uniform, and lead us a long way forward on the right road which they themselves do so much to lay and smooth. It would be a great blessing if we knew the precise date of *Gamelyn*, for it is a most important document. But as it happens it really does not matter

[1] The advantage of taking this with its ballad successors of the fifteenth century is so great that I have taken the liberty of postponing it to the next Book for example and minuter discussion; but it must be referred to here.

whether it is a good deal anterior to Chaucer, which it may be, or but a little; it is certainly not much later. Whether it is the work of a man who, at the beginning of the alliterative and accentual reaction, declined, like a very sensible man indeed, to give up rhyme and fairly regular rhythm, or of one who, taught by experience, relapsed upon them, it tells just the same tale. We know the popularity of it, and you cannot read fifty lines of it without discovering the secret of that popularity. The actual story is a good one, but in the Middle Ages good stories "simply jostle" one another. It is the form that gives it a pre-eminent attraction. There is nothing hide-bound, or pedantic, or offensively literary, about this. But the rhyme at once enlivens it and keeps it tight and trim; the elastic but well-marked rhythm turns the central pause of the strict unrhymed alliterative stave into a sound line-division, with added music for the stanza; and genially "tumbling" as the general cadence is, the author knows how to keep his finger on the stops very well indeed. I thank God for almost everything in English poetry that is good at all; but if I knew where the author of *Gamelyn* was buried I should make a pilgrimage thither at the first opportunity, and go to the expense of an extra cake and candle according to the particular ritual that might suit the *genius loci*.[1]

The more sophisticated adulteries of alliteration and rhyme may excite less enthusiasm, as being almost "faked" things—in a useful and expressive term of slang for which there is no exact literary equivalent. But they are extremely important for study, and that not merely from the point of view which has been mentioned already—the confession which they make of the reluctance of alliteration to rely upon itself alone. When

[1] It is characteristic of the differences in point of view which make our subject so difficult to handle, that some people can see little difference between *Gamelyn* and Robert of Gloucester. I have not, I think, done injustice to the latter: I can recognise in him a most refreshing attempt at "swing and sway," and a not infrequent success in it. But he is only a promising pupil at a Terpsichorean Academy—the *Gamelyn* man could do "Liverpool lurch," or "Boston glide," or anything else you like, in open ballroom.

we come to examine them, we find that all their beauty of *ornamental* alliteration belongs to regular rhymed verse just as properly, while the characteristics which they do derive from their alliterative-accentual *structure* are never an advantage, and sometimes a drawback. The most beautiful of them beyond all doubt—things beautiful not only by comparison, but intrinsically, poetically, without allowance of any kind—are *The Pearl* and *The Pistyl of Susan.* In each of these the excessive structural alliteration is a delusion and a snare, the merely accentual valuation, where that exists, a temptation to slovenliness, luckily resisted but gratuitously incurred by the poet. In each the alliteration, which *is* beautiful, and the variety of equivalence, which *is* harmonious, might exist equally well, and do exist in thousands of other instances without any accentual-alliterative structure at all, but with pure metrical rhymed, or unrhymed, versification by feet.

We are therefore left, as concerns the merits of this group, not less than of that larger and principal body to which we are coming, with this latter itself, the main body, the responsible and representative tenant in tail and owner in fee at once, of English Prosody itself.

The view-point from which we should, as it seems to me, survey this may be best led up to by a brief criticism —conducted in a fashion as far as possible from carping or cavilling or chicanery — of a phrase of Professor Macaulay's in his *Gower*, where, I think, he calls Chaucer a *reformer* of English versification. Here, in a certain loose sense, without going to the absurd extreme which regards "reform" as a sort of term of beatification, but taking "reformer" as equivalent to "improver," we may yield a qualified agreement. But the original and the only accurate sense of "reformer" is as applied to a man who improves *by going back* to some better state which existed before and has been corrupted. This, in regard to English poetry and English versification, Chaucer certainly did not do. We might, indeed, call him its "*per*former" if we gave that word the sense of his

own version of it—the verb *parfourne*, to complete, perfect, bring to consummate and supreme efficiency. Neither was he a "reformer" in the other common, but equally illegitimate and still more mischievous, sense of "innovator." However paradoxical the statement may appear, Chaucer introduced nothing new; he did not, as has been, I hope, shown, even actually "introduce" the decasyllabic couplet. Neither in going back to a golden age non-existent, or existent only in the limbo of Guest, nor in discovering a Promised Land beyond the Wilderness, did Chaucer achieve his greatness. It was by using to the very utmost what already existed, by getting the last pound of work out of the actual conditions of English poetry, by doing everything that was possible at the moment, with the materials accumulated and the methods left him by his predecessors, that Chaucer is Chaucer.

What those materials and those methods were, and how they had come into existence cumulatively, every page of this book has so far, I hope, gone to show. Most if not all of the materials had been discovered, most if not all of the methods had been invented, more than half unwittingly, in something like two centuries at least of haphazard and tentative practice, under the two great controlling influences of the original Teutonic mass and the superinduced French-Latin mould. I have again and again insisted that in the contact of mould and mass there was the amplest and the most intricate "give-and-take"; that if the one showed itself docile and plastic as no other language has ever shown itself, the other showed itself elastic and concessive to a degree equally unparalleled. The "rhythm of the foreigner" becomes a rhythm at which the foreigner stands aghast, or in which he makes such efforts as the admirable epitaph on Shenstone by a French admirer;[1] the rather poor lexicon, the

[1] This plain stone
To William Shenstone.
In his poems he displayed
A mind natural:
At Leasowes he laid
Arcadian fields rural.

narrow grunting register,[1] and the rather complicated accidence of Anglo-Saxon, become the limitless vocabulary, the harmony as of all kinds of music, and the admirably simple grammar or no-grammar of English. As far as his time admitted, Chaucer avails himself of both sets of alteration, and it is only unlucky that the grammar had not profited by shedding as the dictionary had profited by assumption.

But it had not; and the consequence was that, for more than a century to come, the final *e* and other things were half-dead hands, clutching at and tripping the prosodic gait of his imitators and successors. And in the middle division—the (in the literary not the linguistic sense) *phonology* of the language—yet more mysterious changes were to ensue, which we shall have to deal with in the next Book and Interchapter. I am not here speaking of the mere pronunciation. Some excellent and revered friends of mine are of opinion that they know exactly how Chaucer would have read a page of the *Canterbury Tales*; a point on which I regret to say that I am sceptical with a scepticism immedicable and not to be convinced. But it does not really matter. Nothing can be more exquisitely musical to an English ear than the poetry of Æschylus or of Catullus, pronounced in that English fashion which we may be perfectly certain that neither Æschylus nor Catullus ever used, however *un*certain we may be what fashion they did use; and it is the same with Chaucer. Perfect poetry according to its own scheme is always musically transposable into other schemes; imperfect poetry will never make music in its own or in any other.

But this is half (not wholly) a digression. Chaucer, let it be repeated, caught up and uttered the sum of English prosodic, as of all other poetic, capacity up to the time and in the circumstances in which he lived, with hardly any exceptions save in the direction of pure lyric.

[1] Lest this be thought too uncomplimentary to our grandmother tongue, let me recall Quintilian's acknowledgment of the "harsh repulsive letters," the "ox-like lowing" of the *m*, etc. etc., in Latin.

In order to do this he relinquished—perhaps he *had* to relinquish—something of the full potential compass of the instrument here and elsewhere. But in other ways he handed on what he had received from his fathers, organised, husbanded, and put to the best usury and development that was at that time possible. There was much more to be done, but probably he could not have done it ; it was (whether wholly to our misfortune or not, is quite an open question) quite possible for his successors to undo a good deal of what he did, and they very promptly proceeded to do so. But that the prosody of English was a prosody of strict correspondence in feet, yet not of strict correspondence in syllables; that one main secret of success in it was the variation of the pause ; that, while capable of extensive and varied grouping into stanzas, it admitted likewise of a still more subtle and much more variable grouping of what we may call line-sentences into verse-paragraphs ;—this he had shown once for all.

BOOK III

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE DRAMA

The *Harrowing of Hell*—The *York Plays*—The *Townley*—The *Coventry*—The *Chester*—The rest.

I HAVE decided to put the present chapter first in this Book—between the great poets of the fourteenth century and their immediate disciples, and for a time, in some cases, contemporaries of the fifteenth — partly because the dramatic line of the Mysteries shows little of the breakdown of English-verse proper in the later period, but mainly because a great deal of it, as this fact may itself indicate, pretty certainly belongs to the earlier. With enlarged and corrected methods of enquiry it has become almost certain that in no case are the existing MSS. of the four great Mystery cycles, and their smaller "ekings," older than the fifteenth century—the "York" cycle probably belonging in its oldest part to the first third thereof, and the "Townley" and "Coventry" to the last third, while we have no copy of the "Chester" Plays older than the very last years of the sixteenth. But the original forms of some of these almost certainly, and of most of them probably, date back to the fourteenth. Indeed the oldest play of all, the *Harrowing of Hell*,[1] exists in MS. form from the early part of this fourteenth century itself. But this, which is in somewhat irregular and much equivalenced octosyllabic couplets, not differing from many other

The *Harrowing of Hell.*

[1] This will be found in the Appendix of Mr. A. W. Pollard's extremely useful collection and selection of *Miracle Plays* (Oxford, 1890, 4th ed. 1904).

early examples of that metre which we have examined, is very generally and rightly regarded as merely drama in embryo—a *débat*, a dialogue-poem, rather than a drama properly so called.

When we come to the actual representatives of the English mediæval play—things really performed before popular audiences—we note at first sight one curious difference from their analogues, in what may be called, without much exaggeration, the nursing-mother literature of modern Europe at large. The French Miracle and Mystery plays,[1] of which we have abundant examples, are almost wholly in fairly strict octosyllabic couplets, though at this time they admit a curious variety by excursion into the fashionable form of the triolet, very unsuitable as it may seem[2] to dialogue. In place of this "common measure" the English plays offer us an extraordinary variety, which perhaps shows as well as anything else the development of English prosody at the time, and the way in which quite elaborate examples of it could be written by journeymen verse-smiths, mastered by popular actors, and welcomed by popular audiences. For little as we can afford reference to things outside our own scope and subject, let it be remembered that these plays were invariably acted by the guilds of the towns to their fellow-craftsmen and the people at large, in the streets and places of the towns themselves;—that the ancestors of Bottom the weaver and Quince the joiner actually performed them, on the moving stages of pageant-waggons, to the men of Chester and Coventry and York, some two hundred years before Shakespeare laughed at Quince and Bottom themselves.

The *York Plays*.

The *York Plays*,[3] the oldest and the largest collection, if not that which shows the greatest literary originality, exhibit a very remarkable variety of metrical experiment,

[1] The difference does not concern us here, but it is a pity that it has been confused in English.

[2] It is, however, not so bad as it looks, and in the farces (and the farcical interludes which are so common) its quaint composition out of different speeches is sometimes rather effective.

[3] Ed. (excellently) by Miss Toulmin Smith (Oxford, 1885).

and, except in some cases (where there has possibly been clumsy copying), very considerable metrical accomplishment. The two most common forms are the so-called "Burns metre," which is used in six pieces; and another, less crisp and less famous, but much more elaborate, and by no means ineffective, which is used still more frequently—in no less than twelve. But it will be worth while to go through the whole.

The very first would give a text for a long sermon (if we had not preached this already and often) in its combination of alliterative-rhythmical, with strictly metrical measure; in its addition, even to the former, of rhyme in the alliterated portions themselves; and above all in its trisyllabic feet. From the opening stanza given below[1] it will be seen that it is an octave, rhymed *ababcddc*, thus adopting *In Memoriam* arrangement in the second quatrain. In the first the strong central pause is the main agent of rhythm, though there are four fairly disengageable anapæsts, rhyming, sometimes singly, sometimes doubly: in the second these become three only, but the rhyme always double. It does not strike one as a very good dramatic medium, but, as recitative, might be very effective. And above all we see in it the blessed trisyllabic swing and swell, the variation and sway on the iambic tramp, of which it may be said that with

> The oak and the ash and the bonny ivy tree,
> They all flourish best in the North Countree—

(to which we may add the West). No. II.,[2] first of a

[1] (God speaks)—

> I am gracyus and grete, God withoutyn begynnyng,
> I am maker unmade, all mighte es in me,
> I am lyfe and way unto welth wynning,
> I am formaste and fyrste, als I byd sall it be.
> My blyssyng o ble sall be blendyng,
> And heldand fro harme to be hydande,
> My body in blys ay abydande,
> Unendande without[yn] any ending.

[2] Now sene the erthe thus ordand es,
Mesurid and made by myn assent,
Grathely for to growe with gres,
And wedis that sone away bese went.

baker's dozen of more or less similarly arranged plays, is in twelve-line stanzas, of which the first eight are octosyllables, rhyming alternately, the last sixes maintaining the even rhyme, but importing a new odd. The rhyme-order varies slightly in the different examples, but the general effect is much the same. This stanza, like many others, belongs to the class (which we have formerly discussed) of elaborate metrical experiment, either directly or indirectly based on French and Provençal models. This is interesting and valuable, as showing the adaptability of the language, its advance, as we may say, in prosodic education: but it only now and then "turns up trumps," judging by the actual result. III.[1] has interest for us as being in one of the great staple measures, the quatrain of eights, alternately rhymed, and IV.[2] is in Romance stanza tailed with a quatrain of sixes, alternately rhymed, and bound together by the *b* rhyme throughout. In V. the experiment takes the form of one of the elaborate alliterative-rhymed stanzas with bobs,

Of my gudnes now will I ges
So that my werkis no harmes hent,
Two lyghtis, one more and one lesse,
To be fest in the firmament;
The more light to [the] day
Fulle suthely sall be sent,
The lesse lyght all-way
To the nyght sall take entent.
P. 11.

(The *first* stanza is headed with a long couplet of sixteen and twelve syllables, Lat. and Eng.)

[1] In heuyn and erthe duly be dene,
Of v daies werke, evyn unto the ende
I have complete by courssis clene;
Me thynketh the space of tham wele spende.
P. 14.

[2] Adam and Eve, this is the place
That I have graunte you of my grace
To have your wonnyng in.
Erbes, spyce, frute on tree,
Beastes, fewles, all that ye see
Shall bowe to you, more and myn.
This place hight paradyce,
Here shall your joys begynne,
And yf that ye be wyse
Frome this tharr ye never twynne.
P. 18.

(*Vide sup.* p. 117, and *inf.* on Montgomerie.)

or very short lines, in respect of which we have probably the earliest example in *Sir Tristrem*; and VI. is[1] in the "Burns" stanza, evidently the most popular (except the twelve-eight-six, as we may call it) of all. Of the merit of this metre it is quite unnecessary to speak, and Burns's own practice has shown how effective it is for soliloquy. One cannot, on the other hand, say very much for it as a vehicle of dialogue.

VII. is, again, one of alliterative eleven-line bobbed or tagged stanzas, of which we have several, sometimes with the dialogue cunningly interwoven, and resembling, like the Burns stanza, the French conversation-triolet. On VIII., with its staves of eights, as on others that will occur, no very special comment need be made. They are probably all efforts to avoid the continuous octosyllabic couplet which, though we find it constantly in the closely connected "Townley" group, seems to have displeased the York versifiers. IX. is a fourteen-lined alliterative stanza, with a body of eights and a tail of sixes. XIII. (the omitted numbers are replicas of forms already described) is curiously varied, "like a piece of music," as Miss Toulmin Smith justly remarks. The variations extend from a ten-lined stanza turned upside down from that above noticed (*i.e.* an octosyllabic quatrain tailed by a Romance six of eights, both freely equivalenced), which is, if anything, the staple, to an eleven-line alliterative bob-stanza, and other forms. XIV. is still more notable, for it[2] is the Burns stanza, with an extra

[1] *Eve.* Sethyn it was so me knyth it sore,
Bot sythen that woman witteles ware,
Mans maistrie should have been more
Agayns the gilte.
Adam. Nay at my speche wolde thou never spare
That has us spilte.
Ed. cit. p. 33.

It seems to be a sort of equivalent for the French jointed triolet noticed above.

[2] Ther lorde thai kenne, that wate I wele,
They worshippe hym with myght and mayne;
The wedir is colde, as ye may feele,
To halde hym warme thei are full fayne
With thare warme breth,
And oondis on hym is noght to layne
To warm hym with.

line in its body, and with that body rhymed alternately instead of in block. I do not think it is nearly as successful as the shorter and compacter form. XVI., alliterative elevens, very irregularly "bobbed."

XVIII. is an interesting twelve-lined measure tapering in lengths adjusted to the bob system, and furnished with internal rhyme at the turning-point. Among its other interests it has that of suggesting the very short rhymes in the "tedious brief" play of the Athenian craftsmen, which ten thousand people know for one who knows its originals.[1] XIX. is in octaves of sixes, the first quatrain being alternate-rhymed, the last *In Memoriam* fashion, and the rhyme-bond being 1358. XXIV. is in the "lengthened Burns," of which we have spoken, and which we have here the opportunity of contrasting with the "pure Burns," as this comes next. XXVI. begins with one of the longest alliterative-rhyme combinations, fourteen lines divided into an octave of the usual alliteratives and a sixain of three anapæsts each. Then comes a batch consisting of hotch-potch metres admitting, indeed, but hardly deserving schematisation. These are the Passion pieces, the most popular of all, those in which the action is most important, and those in which the interlocutors are most numerous and the interlocution most subdivided—facts which explain the metrical irregularity.

XXXIII. continues the same subject, but would appear to be one of the oldest of all, inasmuch as it is in almost purely alliterative metre—rhymed indeed and roughly stanzaed with bob and wheel, but very irregular

[1] Thou luffely lord that last shall ay,
My god, my lorde, my sone so dere,
To thy godhede hartely I pray
With all myn harte holy entere;
As thou me to thy modir chaas,
I beseke the of thy grace
For all man-kynde,
That has in mynde
To wirshippe the.
Thou se thy saules to saue
Jesu my sone so free
This bone of the I crave.—*Ibid.* p. 139.

in line-length, and very strongly alliterated. XXXIV., after an irregular overture, is in the ten-line (six + four) stanza; XXXVI. in the thirteen-line alliterative; XXXVIII. and XXXIX. in staves of alternately rhymed couplets, various in length. XLI. turns to quatrains of three eights, and a last line ranging from eight to four; while at the end the three first extend themselves to irregular decasyllables and sometimes into anapæstic dimeters. The description may read like a mere muddle, but it is nothing of the kind. One sees, as it were, the prosodist trying the strings and stops of the lyre of English verse, feeling their marvellous elasticity of response, and carried away by it a little, yet never to mere discord. XLIII. goes back to octaves of eight, and XLV. to the other octave formed of an octosyllabic and a hexasyllabic quatrain. XLVIII., reserving XLVI. for special notice, is again in octaves, and the late added fragment on the *Coronation of our Lady* is written in the most aureate language of the fifteenth century, and in that century's most shambling decasyllabic couplets. The parenthesised example, No. XLVI., deserves special mention, because of the extraordinary swing and gusto which is reached by its resolution (as we may call it) of the alliterative-metrical compromise. The middle stop is kept in one sense, but the middle wall of partition which it ordinarily makes, in the long lines, between the rhythm of the two halves is "by the help of the Lord, luppen over," as Mause Headrigg has it. The full swing of the anapæstic tetrameter or dimeter is reached in the long lines opening the stanza. And this is not the most remarkable thing. We are in full *Ingoldsby Legend* with the couplet,

> But the Pharisees fierce
> All his reasons reverse,

and beyond them even into mid-nineteenth century burlesque in

> They dusshed him, they dashed him.
> They lusshed hym, they lasshed hym.
> They pusshed him, they pashed hym.

The trick of identical beginnings has seldom been pushed farther, and often more unsuccessfully, than in the piece quoted in the note,[1] and abundant things throughout are purely Swinburnian.

The *Townley*. The *Townley Plays*,[2] which come (probably) next in order of time to the *York*, and which have been thought to possess some direct connection with them, present one remarkable and pervading, though not constant, prosodic difference, if not on the very first page, yet in the very first play; and that is the presence of the continuous octosyllabic couplet. This appears after a batch of Romance sixes, and the alternation is kept up—a very interesting thing, when it is remembered, first, that the couplet was the universal metre of French Miracle and Mystery; secondly, that these two metres were the staple of English Romance. Both are well managed—indeed it is well known that the *Townley* collection shows the most distinct genius of all the four, especially in a scattered group which exhibits the usual mediæval mixture of solemnity and grotesque with an extraordinarily vigorous (if sometimes also violent) humour. This is shown in the second play, or *Mactatio Abel*, which, with the later *Secunda Pastorum*, is the most famous of all our mysteries. The almost riotous extravagance of the matter communicates itself to the metre, which ranges through all sorts of combinations, from the plain couplet to complicated "thirteens." Medley as it is, however, it is by no means ineffective, though the occasional differ-

[1] I thanke the as reuerent rote of oure reste,
I thanke the as stedfast stokke for to stande,
I thanke the as tristy tre for to treste,
I thanke the as buxsom bough to the bande,
I thanke the as leeffe the lustiest in lande,
I thanke the as bewteous braunche for to bere,
I thanke the as flower that neuere is fadande,
I thanke the as frewte that has fedde us in fere,
I thanke the for euere,
If they repreue me
Now schall thei leue me!
Thi blissinge giffe me
And douteles I schall do my deuere.

[2] Ed. England and Pollard, E.E.T.S., 1897. "Townley" or "Towneley" is optional.

ence of a single line, between stanzas clearly of the same general scheme, shows singular carelessness. But the third or "Ark" Play (which must pretty certainly be by the same hand) shows that the unknown author, when he chose, could observe the most elaborate rules punctually enough. It is written in a nine-line stanza,[1] which might almost as well be a thirteen—for the first lines are Alexandrines with middle- as well as end-rhymes, and might as well or better be written as sixes. They are completed by the usual "bob-wheel"—a four, three eights and a six, *bcccb*. This adapts itself very well to the opening speech of Noah, which is a dignified address to the Divinity, and to God's reply. But it might not seem equally well suited to the action which follows, in which, according to the general mediæval practice, Noah's wife is made to play the part of a comic shrew, though not here, as in some cases, a drunken one. Still the author pieces up the stanzas, and even the lines, with conversation quite deftly. The fourth, *Abraham*, is in octaves of eights, and contains one of those echoing and unforgettable lines which inferior poetries so rarely yield us, but which in English we have almost from the first—

The land of vision is full far.

V.—the short (because imperfect) *Isaac*—is in very good equivalenced couplets,[2] as is the next, *Jacob*, while VII. (*The Prophets*) is in Romance sixes. But in *Pharaoh* (VIII.) we come back to variety, both of line and stanza.

[1] Myghtfull God veray, Maker of all that is,
Thre persons withouten nay, oone God in endles blis,
Thou maide both night and day, beest, fowle and fish,
All creatures that lif may wrought thou at thy wish,
As thou wel myght:
The son, the moyne, verament
Thou maide: the firmament,
The starres also full fervent
To shyne thou maide ful bright.
P. 23.

[2] Com ner|e son | and kys | me
That I | may feyl|e the smell | of the. |
The smell | of | my son | is like
To a feld | with flow|ris or ho|ny bike.
P. 49.

The former oscillates between eight and six, and the eights and sixes are batched, sometimes in octaves and sometimes in fours, rather more than thirty of each, with certain anomalies, which are probably again mere carelessness. From IX. to XI. the two types recur alone or mixed. The first "Shepherd's" Play (XII.), the goodness of which has been rather obscured by the second, and of Mak its hero, employs the nine-thirteen stanza above analysed, as does the *Secunda* itself,—the author, in all cases of need, showing the same extraordinary knack of piecing and "part-metring," as we may say. XIV. is in the Burns stanza—the first appearance here of that favourite Northern medium—but its inconsiderable length is not unbroken. XV. takes the short and much "bobbed" thirteen, rhymed rather uncertainly, and XVI. the other thirteen compressed to nine. XVII. is in the octave of 88868886 *aaabcccb*, with the sixes changed for fours, but shifts after a time to Romance sixes. XVIII., though by no means altogether successful, and metrically very irregular, is interesting from its very irregularity. It is difficult to read without feeling nearly sure that the author was, so to speak, groping for the "common measure" of eight and six in quatrains. But it plays a sort of blind-man's buff with him, and he is constantly *miss*-catching in its place the quatrain of eights, less frequently that of sixes, and sometimes a muddle of all three. These things are quite as instructive, and to any one well broken to the sport, quite as interesting as the finished measures; but we should have to give not merely a stanza or two, but the whole piece, to illustrate them fully. It forms one of the best texts for a special sermon on the subject. And the play contrasts most remarkably with the next (XIX.) on John the Baptist, where the octave of eights is maintained without any great effort throughout. XX. begins the Passion, where we expect irregularity, and find it to an extent better indicated in a note,[1] it being sufficient for the text to say

[1] In XX. (*Conspiracio*) there are at least half-a-dozen *types* of stanzas—besides the couplet. These types vary in themselves as thus :—

that the old hand of *Cain* reappears in a new sense. The "Buffeting" play (*Colaphisatio*) is regular enough in the nine-line form, but the *Flagellation* again takes wide licences, and the *Crucifixion* itself surpasses all in this respect.

In the extraordinary play called *The Talents*, XXIV., Pilate begins with parcel Latin-English in the nine-line stanza before settling to the octave in triplets, only to rove from it again into endless stanza-phases, some of them singularly vigorous. XXV. returns to the irregular common measure, and XXVI. to the Burns stanza, much varied, which is continued in XXVII. XXVIII. goes

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Or that | this nyght | be gone |
Alone | will ye | leyf me ; |
For in | this night | ilkon |
Ye | shall fro | me flee, |

to

Now loke | youre hart | ys be gre|fyd noght
Nawther|e in dre|de ne | in wo
Bot trow | in God | that you | has wroght
And in me | trow ye | also,

while the second and third lines often undoubtedly extend to the full eight, as in

Thou shall | deny | me ty|mes three.

In the *Flagellation* complete fourteeners of excellent swing *without* middle rhyme (as well as others with) appear, as this, which I have purposely given in modern spelling :—

For like as on both sides the iron the hammer maketh plain.

In the *Crucifixion* Our Lady has a song in two beautiful stanzas, arranged on the same middle-rhyme note, besides others in variant :—

Alas ! may euer be my sang, whiles I may lyf in leid,
Me thynk now that I lyf to lang to se my barne thus blede
[Jews] Iues wyrke with hym all wrang, wherefore do they this dede?
Lo, so hy they have him hang—they let for no drede.
Why so
His fomen is he emang? No freynde he has, bot fo.
. . . . . .
Alas Dede ! thou dwellys to lang ! whi art thou hid fro me,
Who kend the to my childe to gang? All blak thou makys his ble.
Now witterly thou wyrkys wrang, the more I will wyte thee,
But if thou will my hartè stang, that I myght with hym dee,
And byde :
Sore syghyng is my sang, for thyrlyd is his hyde !

Ibid. p. 270.

The last word is a curious instance of what all wide-ranging students of poetry know—the ill-luck of poets in the changed or restricted use and association of words which they cannot foresee.

from Romance sixes to Alexandrines, while XXIX., XXX., and XXXI. are once more a pot-pourri, requiring bewildering enumeration to give their schedules and practically the citation of the whole pieces (which are long) to illustrate the bones clothed with verse flesh and blood. It is almost sufficient to say that no ingredient of line or stanza is new, though the gallimaufry may be freshly reconstituted in each case.

The presence of this gallimaufry, with the other presence of the continuous couplet as an alternative, gives the main importance, for us, of the Townley cycle. It is open to any one to contend that, as both it and the York have an at least probable relation to the *Cursor Mundi*, this last feature is a direct survival from the great Middle English "Scripture History." It is open, I think, to any one else to hold that this presence is evidence of a relapse—of an awakening to the consciousness that drama wants a staple metre, which could not, for the time, be the far superior vehicle of blank verse. And this seems to me to suit better with the explanation of the mixed multitude of metres we have surveyed.

The *Coventry*.

The third, or "Coventry" series[1] (it is, of course, a matter of no moment for us whether it is really the *Ludus Coventriae* or not) is believed to be of about the same date as the *Townley* in direct transcription, but there cannot be much doubt that all the collections represent fourteenth-century work, less or more re-handled. From the general fact of their constitution by a large number of smaller units, themselves not quite homogeneous, general impressions are not easy to receive from any of the series, and not likely to be very trustworthy when received. As a rule, however, the "Coventry" group conveys one of rather less extreme metrical variety, and of a certain drift towards length of line, not distantly approaching, in some cases, the ponderous, lolloping doggerel of the early sixteenth-century drama, which, by reaction, helped to bring on blank verse itself. Indeed, side by side with this, or rather as part of it, there is not

[1] Ed. Halliwell (London, 1841).

a little evidence of desertion of the octosyllable—formerly the great staple of verse, dramatic and non-dramatic—for the decasyllable, after a fashion which supports[1] the theory of natural rise of the longer from the shorter measure. But the plan of orderly analysis is too valuable to desert.

The "Prologue" presents at first sight no great difference from the earlier cycle, being the now familiar "thirteen" of an octave and two short lines with mono-rhymed triplet between them, which we have seen so often. But there is here a curious variation which, though it may be present elsewhere, is here particularly noticeable. The line-constituents of the octave vary from long doggerel lines, heavily alliterated, to quite neat and succinct octosyllables of the "rhythm-of-the-foreigner" pattern. But an odd process of compensation is in some cases notable. When the octave is long the bob and wheel are short, and when the octave is of strict, or nearly strict, eights, the bob and wheel considerably extend themselves.

This metre, with drops into 88868886 octaves, perseveres steadily in the first three plays of the actual cycle, and begins the fourth, changing in this latter to other octaves in a line which hesitates between the decasyllable and the "tumbling" alliterative.[2] V., VI., and VII. are octaves of irregularly equivalenced eights, rhymed *ababbcbc*, the same tendency to lengthen the line, however, being noticeable, reaching in VIII. a quite inordinate extent.[3] IX. exhibits the same sort of thing, with differences; but X. relapses upon thirteens and the octave, and XI. is mainly this last, while XII. introduces

[1] See, for instance, most of the plays, in which this cycle is particularly rich, on the conception and birth of Christ.

[2] Some of the breakdowns are very plastic, as in II., where Eve, falling into the beautiful rhythm noticed above, says (spelling purposely modernised)—

Alas | that ev|er that speech | was spo|ken
That the | false an|gel said | unto me; |
Alas, | our Ma|ker's bid|ding is bro|ken,
For I | have touched | his own | dear tree.

[3] Another to the pilgrims and poor men: the third for them with me abide.

. . . . . .

For my barrenness he may amend this himself, and thou list, to-morrow.

(Spelling again modernised to bring out the effect. The close is a "thirteen" and a quatrain.)

that frequent and Protean variety, the dizain, consisting of a Romance six and a quatrain "long" or common.[1] The same measures continue in varying doses till XVI., the "Adoration of the Shepherds," in which, as in the next, the "Adoration of the Magi," combinations of very short lines appear as a change. All the rest, I think, are more or less made up of the same metres, so that we have for a general result—besides that significant lengthening of the line which has been noted side by side with the shorts—a slightly greater variety of "make-up," to match the slightly less variety of the ingredients used. The whole cycle is a sort of lucky-bag, in which you may dip and get very different things. But its lesson is, on the whole, a more strictly fifteenth-century one than that either of York or of Townley—a lesson of transition.

The *Chester*.

The excessively corrupt state of the text of the fourth or "Chester" series, of which we only possess copies, the oldest of them dating from the extreme end of the sixteenth century, would make it superfluous in any case to analyse it with the fulness which we have given to the others. But through all this corruption we can see a general lesson which has nothing new for us. There is fair evidence that the cycle in its originals was pretty old—it may, perhaps, have been the oldest of all—and this is confirmed by the prosody, in which the commonest metres are alternately rhymed octosyllabic quatrains, or the favourite arrangement of an octave consisting of two mono-rhymed triplets, with fourth and eighth lines (sixes) rhymed together.

The rest.

So also the examination of the two large series may relieve us from that of the *Digby* and *Macro* collections, and of the few isolated examples, which have nothing new to show. The word "relieve" must not be misunderstood, and is to be taken with strict reference to prosody.

[1] We have noticed, and shall notice, more than once the frequency of this combination. It is not surprising, the two stanzas separately being, and to be, the most popular metres of all—and perhaps the eldest—after the octosyllabic couplet itself. To build with both of them is exactly what would occur naturally, in that more unschooled than scholastic process of prosodic experiment and development which I believe to have taken place in our poetry.

The Digby *Magdalene* is perhaps the most interesting English miracle-play of a serious kind, and for the due comprehension of the historic connection of our drama simply invaluable; and the Macro *Castell of Perseverance* —vast, enormous, exemplary—may be shuddered at by Frivolity, but must be accepted by Knowledge. Still, they and their fellows have little that is new prosodically, and nothing that is necessary for us to analyse.[1]

[1] It is in the classification and analysis of the numerous and complicated metres of these plays, and of the miscellaneous poems in Bk. II. Chap. III., that oversights are most likely to occur. I have done my best to avoid them, and can only promise gratitude to any one who will let me know of slips.

CHAPTER II

THE SUCCESSORS OF CHAUCER

Ungracious state of the subject—Lydgate and his reputation—His older panegyrists—His recent defenders—The *Minor Poems*—*London Lickpenny*—The *Story of Thebes*—The *Temple of Glass*—The *Assembly of Gods*—The *Secrets of the Philosoffres*—The *Two Nightingale Poems*—The *Pilgrimage* and other octosyllabic poems—Occleve—An interim lesson from the pair—The last group—Hawes—The *Conversion of Swearers*—The *Pastime of Pleasure*—Barclay—Skelton—His "doggerel"—The "Skeltonic" verse.

Ungracious state of the subject.

THE successors of Chaucer (a phrase usually including his younger contemporaries, especially Lydgate and Occleve) occupy, as many people know who have never opened a page of their writing, a peculiar and most unenviable pillory. There is hardly a literary historian who does not "spare" them "a curse." This special kind of passing, parenthetic, and sometimes actually silent abuse has very few parallels in literature; and when the abusers condescend to give reasons, which is not always the case, these reasons are most frequently drawn from our own division of the subject. So that—without recapitulating these in general, for they will come out sufficiently in the handling—we may proceed with some zest, unattractive as the subject is generally considered, to that handling itself, and to the orderly accumulation of the facts of the case before delivering judgment on them.

Lydgate and his reputation.

In age very probably, in length of life it would seem, in bulk of work almost without doubt, and in contemporary and immediately posthumous fame without any doubt at all, the primacy among these persons is due to

John Lydgate.[1] The fifteenth century, and even great part of the sixteenth, did not hesitate to rank him with Chaucer and Gower in a trinity of patternhood for English poetry. Not merely men like Hawes, whose genius, though perhaps superior to his own, was of the same kind, but men like Dunbar, whose concentrated and fiery quality might seem most alien from his fecund but flaccid voluminousness, heaped eulogies upon him. The early press did him yeoman's service; and the Elizabethan critics, if they were not so extravagant in his praise as their fathers and grandfathers, yet spoke respectfully of him, and in particular assigned him "good verse." While not retaining the shadowy name-greatness of Chaucer in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he escaped the occasional contempt; and in the middle of the latter century he found a singular champion in Gray, who probably transmitted interest in him to Coleridge, and who actually commits himself to the statement that Lydgate "surpasses Gower in smoothness." It is, however, noticeable that all Gray's illustrations are taken from the *Falls of Princes* only; and though he seems to have known of other work of Lydgate's, it is not quite clear to what extent he knew it.

His older panegyrists.

The approval, such as it is, of Elizabethan critics like Webbe and Puttenham will not stand much examination. It is traditional, not to say ignorant, in character; it is vague in expression; and it is largely conditioned, if not quite coloured and covered, by one consideration. These critics (as the fuller handling of them in the next volume will, I hope, show) were almost entirely dominated by the subject-theory of poetry, and by the narrowest ideas of syllabic uniformity. How little they cared for real poetic music is shown sufficiently by the approval that they

[1] For some years past the E.E.T.S. has most properly devoted itself to the provision, at last, of a complete Lydgate, the issues of which up to date will be cited (and sometimes criticised) *infra*. Till almost the end of the nineteenth century there was nothing accessible, outside the MSS. and the very rare and costly printed originals, except the *Tale of Thebes* and a few other pieces in Chalmers (under the head of Chaucer) and the *Minor Poems* edited by Halliwell for the Percy Society (London, 1840).

extended to the creaking abominations of classical "versing." Lydgate, in the work which they chiefly knew of his—the same *Falls of Princes*—dealt with grave and stately subjects just after their liking, and they probably gave him the benefit of antiquity for the defects of form, which, even on their standard, he exhibits.

We, on the other hand, may also give him, and Occleve, and the rest, benefit of a certain kind, which will be fully set forth in the Interchapter to this Book. But meanwhile they must underlie, as all other fellow-sinners since must underlie, the reproach of not knowing the main business of the poet, which is to get poetical music out of the language which he uses. There may be mitigating circumstances to urge against too heavy punishment for the crime—but, as for the gravity of that crime itself, I myself do not see how the most ingenious advocate who respects facts can argue for an acquittal.

But here some one will perhaps cry "Softly, sir! Are you quite certain that the fault is not in your own ear? Did not people, and sometimes people of positive genius, attribute, at least to Lydgate, no small share of definitely metrical and poetical charm?" The demurrer is quite a fair one *prima facie*; but it is not hard to deal with it. Who are the main praisers and what are their praises? They have been mentioned briefly already, and may be classed thus—1. Dunbar and Hawes for persons of real worship at the beginning of the sixteenth century; 2. The common contemporaries and immediate successors; 3. The Elizabethan critics, already despatched. Now those in Class 2 were mostly very dull dogs; indeed they were all directly or indirectly pupils of Lydgate, and they were certain not merely to ignore but to fail to see his faults, because they were their own. Benedict Burgh, for instance, the chief of these pupils, can give his master points, as we shall see, for prosodic and poetical *amousia* of all kinds. The same, though he was not stupid and *was* a poet now and then, is the case with Hawes. In Dunbar genius and poetry had a much greater part. But Dunbar was in a manner a foreigner: he was writing

literary standard English (so far as he did write it) almost as we write Latin verses, and it would have been very ungenerous of him if he had abused his nearest and most copious pattern and master, however much he himself bettered that master's instruction. In addition to which let it be remembered that in all these men the critical sense was not at all, or was hardly, born; they all had that astonishing *indiscriminateness*—that "Groves of Blarney" promiscuity—which marks the literary appreciation of the Middle Ages wholly, and in only a little less degree that of the Transition.

The praise of Gray and Coleridge has been sufficiently discounted already. But if they were too complimentary, and if neither knew quite enough, a younger contemporary of Gray, an elder contemporary of Coleridge, who knew Lydgate very thoroughly indeed, more than made up the balance by *un*complimentariness. With his usual politeness Ritson, after an immense catalogue[1] of work by or attributed to Lydgate, boxes one of his ears as that of a "prosaic, voluminous, and drivelling monk," and brings him up again by smiting the other in regard to his "drawlings, in which there are scarcely three lines together of pure and accurate metre." And although Ritson's violence of language and temper did him no good, the busy and ever-increasing study of older English literature did certainly, for this reason or that, neglect Lydgate remarkably during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, with the exceptions noted above. The Early English Text Society, as also noted, has at last buckled to the task, though there is still very much to do.[2]

[1] *Bibliotheca Poetica* (London, 1802), pp. 66-90. Some of Lydgate's recent German editors and champions have been nearly as severe on Ritson himself. There is nothing to be said for his temper or his manners; but the man who knew what he knew a hundred years ago is not to be belittled by those who have profited (or not) by nearly four generations of his and others' labour. As for Warton, his observations on Lydgate, though numerous enough, are rather gingerly, and seem to avoid focussing themselves up into a definite criticism. "Verbose" and "languid" find themselves side by side with "harmonious" and "elegant"; and must feel rather inclined to say to them, "What on earth are *you* doing here?"

[2] I hope it is not ungracious to express a wish that the whole task—a gigantic one, I admit—had been entrusted to one person, and that person an

His recent defenders.

Some of the editors of these reprints, animated no doubt, in part at any rate, by chivalrous devotion to their client, have been wroth with Lydgate's decriers,[1] and especially with Ritson. The line of defence is, of course, obvious—to find fault with the presentation of the texts, and to say that those who (as some even of themselves have done) depreciate the monk's versification, do so merely from reliance on a *bad* text. Unfortunately the retort is not less obvious—that a so-called "critical" text, with its pickings from this manuscript and that, or its reconstruction of a single one according to manufactured rules, may to some extent restore prosodic system, but will always be subject to the doubt whether it in the least resembles what the poet wrote. But some have gone further still, relying on that singular idea (not German only, but entertained by the Germans with greater freedom and *naïveté* than by any other nation, or by any class of students of literature save the minor classical rhetoricians), that if you can, in this or that fashion, reduce things to some sort of classification, you have done all that can possibly be required of you. Thus Dr. Schick,[2]

Englishman. Foreigners can do prose well enough, but their editing of verse is almost inevitably unsatisfactory, while the distribution of the task among many different hands, native and foreign, makes it almost impossible that even identical, let alone probably correct, views of prosody will be taken. Of course I know what my friend Dr. Furnivall would say, and say truly: but it is a pity.

[1] Who include even such an admirably competent and well-willing Middle English authority as Dr. Skeat.

[2] I cannot refrain (grateful as I am to him and others for the texts they have given us) from illustrating Dr. Schick's attitude to English prosody by a line which he does *not* approve—

In Wiltshire of England two priestes there were.

This, he decides, has no metre at all, or can only be scanned as an introduction of "Firdausi's line." I am not ashamed to confess that "having" no Persian I am ill at Firdausi's numbers (are they amphibrachs or antibacchics?); but I wish no English poet had ever written a worse line than this. For it is clear to any Englishman that Lydgate may have meant—

In Wilt|shire of | Engländ | two priests | there were;

or this—

In Wilt|shire of Eng|land two | priestes | there were;

or may have indulged in that very English metre the anapæstic dimeter,

the editor of the *Temple of Glass*, agreeing in the main with Dr. Schipper, though not as to his scanning of lines, says that Lydgate has five types of the "five-beat" line.

These five types are, put briefly in the language of this book:

A. The typical decasyllable with normal run.
B. A form with an extra syllable before the cæsura.
C. One with a syllable too few at the cæsura.
D. The nine-syllable Chaucerian type.
E. A line with a trisyllabic beginning.

Classificatum est, and apparently nothing more is thought necessary: though we find to our surprise that, after all, Lydgate is "a doggerel poet" who has not "a sensitive ear for rhythm." Between this and Ritson there does not seem much more than the differences of a less and a more violent vocabulary. Unfortunately we cannot let Drs. Schick and Schipper off with a mere conviction for inconsistency. Let us examine these types a little more carefully. As to A and E nothing need be said. The first, of course, "standeth crowned," and the last will receive, from me at least, an extra prize for a valuable championship of true liberty. D, I have said, is, I think, a mistake, but it is a mistake made in following Chaucer, and so venial. B, I should account for as a line with a trisyllabic foot in this case or that, and pass it readily as such, though I should say that Lydgate's use of it is generally clumsy and inharmonious, justifying Ritson's black-mark, if it had been less truculently applied. But as for C,[1] which we are told is "peculiar to Lydgate," or

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which often in the fifteenth century intrudes even where it seems to have no business—

In Wilt|shire of Eng|land two pries|tes there were;

or, lastly, that this may be one of the "walkings" of our "ghost"—the amphibrach itself. At any rate, if Dan John had never done anything worse, he would certainly not have incurred Ritson's censure—nor mine.

[1] *E.g.* Dr. Schick's own illustrations from the *Temple of Glass*—

For specheles nothing maist thou spede.
If eny word in the be myssaide.
Sith noon but she may thi sores sound.

at any rate peculiarly Lydgatian, "more developed in his works than anywhere else," "very common," etc.—I can only say that the form seems to me incurable, intolerable, hopelessly characteristic of "a doggerel poet without a sensitive ear for rhythm." The commoner it is, the more fully developed, the more peculiarly Lydgatian, the clearer is it that Lydgate was a bad metrist. The case is practically given away. But we shall not take unfair advantage of the giving, and as usual examine the texts *seriatim* and seriously.

The *Minor Poems.*

With regard to the *Minor Poems*, it may be granted to the objectors above cited that a more careful edition of them, distinguishing those which are certainly Lydgate's from those which are not, and giving MS. collations, is much needed. Yet it may be much doubted whether any substantial mending is possible. The prevailing metre is, as we should expect, rhyme-royal, which Chaucer had made popular, of which he had given numerous and admirable patterns, and which, by its precise and yet not too exacting prosodic arrangement, was well calculated to keep stumbling versifiers from actual falling. Unluckily the opening poem, on Henry the Sixth's entry into London after his coronation at Paris, is one of the very worst of all, and one of the most seemingly impossible to mend. One can hardly even imagine more shambling metre and beggarly phrase than that of the passage cited below.[1] Others are somewhat better—"The Marriage between an Old Man and a Young Wife" (Lydgate is always better at the satiric than at the serious), the "Horse, Goose, and Sheep," of which Halliwell strangely gave but part, and

[1] (Absolutely *à la fortune du pot* and not quite so bad as some.)

> Ther whas the bisshope of Rouchester allso
> The dene of Poulys, the chanons everychon,
> Of dew os thei oughte to doo,
> On procession with the Kyng to goon,
> And thoughe I cannot reherse them on by oone,
> Yet dar I sey as in ther entent
> To do theyre dever fulle truely they ment.

If this be not doggerel, the word has neither connotation nor denotation in English.

especially "The Churl and the Bird." In some pieces Lydgate accepts or attempts the ballade form: and he has several combinations of octosyllables and decasyllables, with some novelties, especially the very interesting measure of "London Lickpenny," the best known and by far the best and brightest of his efforts.

It has been said that Lydgate is better at light subjects than at heavy ones, his lack of sheer poetry being less apparent in them, and his prosodic shortcomings benefiting by the universal allowance to comic verse, while his actual sense of fun is by no means dull. The huge translation of the *Pilgrimage of Man* is full of humorous passages, for the most part quite intended, and several of the minor poems are really amusing. But *London Lickpenny* is the best and most sustained of all, not merely from the point of view of students of manners and customs, but from that of lovers of literature. There is no such vivid picture of old London anywhere, and the vividness is very greatly assisted by the metre,[1] in which the rhyme-royal of eights, instead of making a stumbling effort at syllabic uniformity, swings with an ease and sureness of equivalence, contrasting most satisfactorily, but, from another point of view, most strangely, with the knock-kneed halting of his usual verse. And, independently of its individual merit, the thing connects itself most interestingly as the work of a known writer, highest ranked of his own later contemporaries in what some call "art-poetry," with those popular *adespota*, which,

London Lickpenny.

[1] Unto the Rolls I gat me from thence,
Before the clarkes of the chauncerye,
Where many I found earnyng of pence,
But none at all once regarded mee.
I gave them my playnt uppon my knee:
They lyked it well when they had it reade,
But lackyng money I could not be sped.
Etc. etc.

Few pieces exhibit the *life* given by trisyllabic equivalence better than this. The refrains in other poems are not seldom good, as—

All stant in change like a mydsomer rose.

But they may have been second-hand.

as we shall see, go some way to remove the reproach of the century in matters prosodic.

The *Story of Thebes.*

That reproach is most certainly not removed by the *Story of Thebes*, though, once more, the protest of the defenders about a bad text must be allowed for what it is worth.[1] Sure one may be, at any rate, that not many worse texts, whether the fault be the fault of author, copyist, or printer, exist, out of the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth. And one may feel very nearly sure that the abundance of such texts at this time is not purely a coincidence. No doubt by a sufficient exercise of eclecticism, and especially by that "touching up the final *e*'s," of which Dr. Furnivall has spoken (with the mixture of frankness and humour which endears him to all who know him personally, and should do so to many who only know his writings), you may do much. But what you never will do, without sheer rewriting, is to get out of Lydgate, especially in his decasyllabic verse, any kind of flowing or poetical metre. It is not merely that the five precious types, and that most precious of all, the broken-backed "C," swarm and wriggle "like crushed frogs," as Dirk Hatteraick says of the unlucky gauger. Unless you do something more than "touch up" you will find it impossible to resist the conclusion that there are frequent octosyllabic lines in the piece, and, what is more, that the actual octosyllabic couplet is to be found there.[2] Challenging, as the thing almost insanely does, a direct comparison with the *Knight's Tale*, its deficiencies no doubt come out even more strangely, and are presented as even more hideous than they are. But they are hideous enough in themselves.

The Hyperion (not merely a stock phrase here, as will be seen) and the satyr are most glaringly contrasted in a

[1] Not for more. And, as it so happens, we have both *London Lickpenny* and *part* of the *Story* carefully edited in Professor Skeat's *Specimens* (3rd ed. Oxford, 1880).

[2] In the Skeat version, which is sure to have had all that can be done for it, a passage of fourteen lines, or seven couplets, contains five octosyllabic lines, one of them apparently catalectic, and three couplets which would be much better if frankly octosyllabic. (*Specimens*, ed. cit. p. 28, ll. 1077-90.)

pair of passages which Professor Skeat has duly brought together, but the prosodic and poetic lesson of which he has mercifully refrained from drawing. Every one knows Chaucer's really magnificent lines in the *Knight's Tale* (633-638), where individually excellent verses make a perfect whole—

> The busy larke, messager of day,
> Salueth in hire song the morwe gray,
> And fyry Phebus ryseth up so brighte
> *That al the orient laugheth of the lighte.*
> And with his stremes dryeth in the greves
> The silver droppes honging on the leves.

Lydgate in *Story of Thebes*, 1250 *sq.*, writes—

> Ther he lay to the larke song
> With notes newe hegh up in the ayr.
> The glade morowe rody and right fayr,
> Phebus also casting up his bemes
> The heghe hylles gilt with his stremes.

Here the whole is a creaking discord. And as for the parts—line 3 is individually tolerable; 1 would be so in an octosyllabic poem, but is here quite out of place; 2 can just be made so by touching up the *e*'s and allowing hiatus at the cæsura; but 4 is either the abominable "C" or a single-syllable first-foot line; and 5 is apparently the latter. Every line but one wants an apology of some kind: and the whole team hirples, and pulls in different directions, after a fashion partly comic and partly disgusting.

The *Temple of Glass*.

Turning to the new critical or edited texts, it is natural to take first the elaborately commented *Temple of Glass*,[1] to which reference has been made. This consists of a heroic prologue and epilogue, and of a body of some 120 rhyme-royal stanzas. The first is interesting, because the editor has not scrupled to do the "touching up" where the state of the MSS. was not gracious, nor to insert *chevilles* of his own when the early printers do not satisfy him. By all which spiritings, and by the help of his Five Types, he has got things into a kind of shape.

[1] Ed. J. Schick, E.E.T.S., London, 1891.

But the shapelessness of it after all will be best shown by an example.[1]

And the same may be said of the rhyme-royal,[2] remembering always what has been observed of that metre and its effects on poets of this time.

The *Assembly of Gods*.

The *Assembly of Gods*[3] has been denied to Lydgate (as, for the matter of that, have the *Temple of Glass* and many other pieces), but, as it seems to me, with no good reason. Its editor believes in "critical" editing, and observes, with a coolness which I do not know whether to admire or not, that fifteenth-century MSS. are not much to be depended on, as we know the disuse of the *e* made scribes put in words to patch up. The remark is a little far-ranging, and might be applied to the nineteenth and twentieth; but that need not matter to us. Dr. Triggs is, however, not one of those happy persons who, so long as they can classify irregularities, seem to regard them as no irregularities at all, very much as if, when the calendar of the Central Criminal Court has been made out, and the offences classified, the prisoners were then to be dismissed

[1] The opening—

> For thought, constreint, and greuous heuines,
> For pensif $^{nes}_{hede}$ and for heigh distres,
> To bed I went nov this othir night,
> Whan that Lucina with hir pale light
> Was joyned last with Phebus in Aquarie,
> Amyd Decembre, when of Januarie
> Ther be Kalendes of the newe yere.

[2] Stanza 16—

> This is to sein—douteth neuer a dele—
> That ye shal have ful poss[ess]ion
> Of him that ye cherissh nov so wel,
> In honest maner, withoute offencioun,
> Because I cnowe your entencion
> Is truli set in parti and in al
> To loue him best and most in special.

[3] Ed. O. L. Triggs, E.E.T.S., London, 1896. Dr. Triggs's coolness is almost excessive. He admits that Mr. Lowell may be right in speaking of Lydgate's "barbarous jangle": it is "probably correct" if Chaucer is taken as standard. But "O.F. verse, with its great variety of lines and measures" (what this means I do not know; the syllabic regularity of O.F. is nearly impeccable), "*and* Chaucer's own verse forms" may have caused licence. "*If we forego a fixed metre and read the lines with their natural accentuation, a fairly good rhythm is secured.*" Dr. Pangloss is nowhere with Dr. Triggs!

without a stain on their characters. He honestly schedules the lines in the *Assembly* as follows: 2 fourteen-syllable lines, 5 thirteen, 47 twelve, 210 eleven, 546 ten, 179 nine, and 7 eight. To which for convenience we may add the similar enumeration of Mr. Steele, the editor of the *Secrets of the Philosoffres*[1] (like the *Assembly* written in rhyme-royal, and, as concerns part of it, certainly Lydgate's); 1 fourteener, 2 thirteeners, 46 Alexandrines, 223 eleven syllables, 989 of the normal size, 287 nine syllables, 40 eight, and 2 seven.

The *Secrets of the Philosoffres.*

The great similarity of these results, the fact that one of the pieces is as certainly Lydgate's as anything that we have, and the commendable refusal of both editors to adopt the process of "touching up," make it worth while to base some comments upon them. As for a third edited text, the *Two Nightingale Poems*,[2] we have made-up rhymes-royal with editorial buckwashing, and the uniformity, such as it is, is naturally greater. But prosodic, as distinguished from arithmetical, correctness is very little better attained.

The *Two Nightingale Poems.*

It has been generally admitted by those who have examined Lydgate's versification, whatever the view which they may have taken of it in general, that he is very much less to seek in the octosyllable than in the decasyllable. The decasyllable, although, as we have seen, an early if not frequent or regular product of the imposition of foot-scansion on English language, was, as we have seen also, a very late comer to any considerable extent, and though rarely fortunate in its chief introducer, was not unmixedly lucky in the time and circumstances of its introduction. It had been brought in just as the great changes in regard to the final *e* and other matters were beginning, and the result was that Chaucer's followers had to apply Chaucer's metre to pronunciation which was every day ceasing to be Chaucerian. The octosyllable, on the other hand, was of the most ancient house of distinctively English—that is Middle English — poetry. It had shown itself, struggling but

The *Pilgrimage* and other octosyllabic poems.

[1] E.E.T.S., London.

[2] Ed. Otto Glauning, E.E.T.S., London, 1900.

holding its own, at the very birth thereof; it had steadily triumphed; it had never been cast out or held under; and, best of all, it had, from all but the earliest period, adapted itself to the two systems, uniform and equivalenced, of syllabic metring. It was thus perhaps prepared to meet any change in pronunciation, any difficulties of form; its general rhythm being so planted in the English tongue and ear that nothing could drive it out or smother it.

Therefore, whether we meet it in the ambitious and precise allegorising of *Reason and Sensuality*,[1] or in the enormous and fantastic excursions of the *Pilgrimage*,[2] or in *Guy*, or in the *Saints' Lives*, or where not, we note in it a competence which Lydgate, prosodically speaking, never possesses, or at least displays, elsewhere.[3] He is licen-

[1] Ed. Sieper, E.E.T.S., London, 1901 *sq.* The preciseness even extends to the metre, and Lydgate is often content with a simple catalexis when he wants a change.

[2] Ed. Furnivall, E.E.T.S., London, 1899 *sq.* Here is a passage from this (which for the last half-dozen years has been my "Baruch," though I do not know that I have been more successful in my exhortations than La Fontaine was in his). The Pilgrim, elaborately armed and exhorted by "Grace-Dieu," has rather reluctantly set out, and meets a young lady "off queynte array," and well feathered. He takes a great fancy to her, tells her so with much plainness, and wants to know who she is. She is Youth, she says, and proceeds to expound her attributes and habits with a charming frankness. Wise and goody persons may say this or that—

> But off al thys I do no cure,
> I wīll be ffethryd and go ffie,
> And among, go sporte me:
> Pleye at the cloos, among, I shal
> And somewhyle rennyn at the bal
> Wyth a staff mad lyk an hook;
> And I wyl han a kampyng crook;
> Ffor I desyre in my depos
> Ffor to han non other croos.
> And, among, I wyl nat spare
> To hunt for hert, ffor buk and hare;
> Somtyme fysshe and cachche ffowlys,
> And somtyme pleyen at the bowlys;
> Among, shetyn at bessellys,
> And after pleyn at the merellis,
> Now at the dees,—etc.
>
> . . . . .
>
> And the ffyn of my entent is
> To folwe the lust of my corage,
> And to spende my yonge age
> In merthe only, and in solace,
> Ffolowe my lustes in ech place:
> Therto hooly I me enclyne,
> Rather than to han doctryne
> Off ffader, moder, thogh they be wyse,
> Al ther techyng I despyse;
> And in no thyng ys set my cure
> But my lustys to procure.
>
> *Ed. cit.* p. 305, ll. 11,178 *sq.*

[3] It is perhaps only fair to give here first Lydgate's own confession and apology as to *res metrica* (with the rather unkind caution that this may be a piece of false humility, imitated, like so much else, from Chaucer, but without the saving grace of Chaucer's irony), and also the stanza which Warton has pronounced "harmonious and elegant."

tious enough, but then the licences of the octosyllable were an old theme, and he must indeed have been a clumsy or a disorderly person who could not content himself with them. One note, indeed, there is of the prosodic and poetical weakness which besets Lydgate here as elsewhere —the use of tags and stuffings for the verse which is so constant and so shameless in the romancers, especially in his own contemporary Lonelich.[1] But otherwise there is not so much fault to find with him. He is here weak, but not utterly inharmonious or halting. In his intentionally decasyllabic verse he *is* utterly halting and inharmonious. But further remarks on these defects of his will be best postponed till we have given some notice to Occleve, the traditional partner of his sin, and still further ones till we have also surveyed their fifteenth and early sixteenth century followers.

Occleve.

Occleve[2] is interesting to the general literary historian as a "moon" of Lydgate, as the source of some not unlively sketches of manners, as a fresh rehandler of one famous story, and as the rather dull teller of another. But he has, for the historian of English prosody, one special and almost singular merit.[3] Nobody has ventured to say that we have a single piece of Chaucer in Chaucer's own hand; and

---

The first is from the *Troy Book*:—

> And trouthe of metre I sette also asyde;
> For of that art I hadde *as tho* no guyde [observe this]
> Me to reduce whan I went a-wronge:
> I toke none hede nouther of shorte nor longe.

The other from the *Life of Our Lady*:—

> O thoughtfull herte, plonged in distresse
> With slombre of slouth this long wynter's night!
> Out of the slepe of mortall hevinesse
> Awake anon, and look upon the light
> Of thilke sterre, that with her bemys bright
> And wyth the shynynge of her stremes merye
> Is wont to glad all our hemisperie.

It may be admitted that the *Stella Maris* has shone kindly on her poet here.

[1] They wish us now to call him Lovelich. I decline—he is most *un*lovely; and besides, the next authority is sure to put the *n* back, or make it something else.

[2] Ed. Furnivall and Gollancz, E.E.T.S., London, 1897 *sq.*

[3] Gower, see *ante*, may come near, but not quite up to him.

Lydgate-study has not progressed far enough for us to be certain whether anything or nothing of his is in such a state. But there appears to be good reason for believing, on the tolerably solid ground of handwriting,[1] that we have much, if not most, of Occleve's own work in Occleve's own hand. This is what *we* want most of everything, and before everything. By the help of this we can see that, whatever Lydgate may have done, Occleve did do his best to get ten syllables into each line. His work is almost wholly decasyllabic, and commonly in rhyme-royal with a few octaves. The result of examining it is very curious. By using or rejecting the *e*, as he chooses, and by making any syllable long or short, as he chooses likewise, with certain further liberties as to elision or "synizesis," he does, as a rule, manage to get his tale of syllables correct. But to any poetical, or even decently rhythmical, effect his verse is almost wholly a stranger, except in a few single lines of sententious character, for which, as was suggested above of Lydgate, he may not wholly deserve the credit. Having, I think, no sense of humour (Dr. Furnivall is a little more merciful than I am on this point, though hardly on the other), he has no lightness of manner as Lydgate sometimes has, and his gravity, whether lugubrious or didactic, always drags as heavily as a sledge on gravel.

Yet he, thanks to his autographs, and Lydgate, thanks to his immense voluminousness and the testimony of its uniformity in variety, are of the very greatest value to us. If considered with any tolerable measure of impartiality and care, they begin, and outline pretty clearly, a lesson which is filled in by all their minor contemporaries, except the unknown authors of plays and carols and other folk-literature, by their successors down to Skelton and Hawes unmistakably, and even, to a certain extent, by Surrey and Wyatt themselves. The moral cannot be drawn fully till later. It is enough to say here that it is a lesson of disorganisation, almost of disbandment, a pro-

[1] He was a Civil Servant, and we have his "works" (in Lamb's sense) of that kind to go by.

clamation of: "To your tents, O Israel," from the prosodic point of view.[1]

An interim lesson from the pair.

These two notorious poets may even in this place give a good text for some observations which are most pertinent to our general enquiry, but which could not be made before, because the work of the average poet before Chaucer is too experimental and uncertainly definable, while Chaucer himself is not obnoxious to them. The prosodic sin of Lydgate and of Occleve is not so much that they fail—though both, and especially Lydgate, do fail—in satisfying the norm of the individual verse, as regards syllables and cæsuras and such like things. It is a sin, the missing or excusing of which by their apologists shows, in those apologists, that they share it, and so are blind or kind to it. Take the examples above given from both, most of them carefully edited from MSS. and buckrammed up with editorial stays and mendings. Some of them do pass the mere test of the fingers, and though others do not, they might, with more pains, be coaxed or forced into the same state. Some yet other things, in Lydgate especially, could *not* be so. But this is not the important part of the matter. The "lucky licence" often makes harmony of the most antinomian discord. But what is noticeable in these two, and again

[1] Here are some Occlevian examples :—

1. (Metrically exact)—

> And in the wyntir, for the way was deep,
> Unto the brigge I dressid me also,
> And ther the bootmen took upon me keep,
> For they my riot knewen fern ago ;
> With hem was I i-tugged to and fro,
> So wel was him that I with wolde fare ;
> For riot paieth largely everemo ;
> He styntith nevere til his purs be bare.
>
> *Male Regle*, st. 25.

2. (Metrically just passable, except the line italicised, but rhythmically bad) —

> Among folies all is noon, I leue,
> More than a man his gode ful largely
> Despende, in hope men wol hym releue
> Whan his gode is dispended utterly ;
> The indigent men setten no thing by.
> *I, Hoccleue, in swhich case am gilty, this me touchith,*
> So seith povert when oon foole large him vouchith.
>
> *De Regimine Princ.* st. 623.

in Lydgate especially, is that neither licence nor legality has any luck at all—that the whole thing is prosaic, hobbling, broken-backed doggerel. There are sometimes tolerable lines, the better being usually in Occleve. But, as a rule, phrase and cadence alike are absolutely destitute of continuity and music. Some batches of Lydgate will make very tolerable, though very undistinguished prose if run straight on—a thing that good verse next to never does. Some will acquire a sort of "horse-fiddle" harmony, by shoving or forcing accent. As the best lines are in Occleve, so are the worst, where you have to value the final *e*'s, in a manner that was in all probability by the time quite obsolete and unnatural, in order to get even the test of the finger answered. It is a common expression (whether an accurate one does not here matter) in poetical criticism, to talk of the "added charm" of metre, the "pleasure produced by metrical compositions," and the like. Here, surely, there is no such thing; on the contrary, there is added *disgrazia*—an unnecessary and wilful ugliness. English prose was but, in the full sense, beginning in the days of Lydgate and Occleve. But in the earlier part of these days Chaucer himself and (whoever he was) "Mandeville"; in, or scarcely after, these later days Fortescue and Malory, could write, not merely plainly and forcibly, but with considerable grace in prose. Here plainness in the good sense, vigour, and grace are equally absent; plainness in the bad hopelessly present.

The last group.

Hawes and Skelton, two of the latest poets of the directly and almost exclusively Chaucerian tradition (the third, Barclay, has, till lately, received less attention), have always had a considerable interest for students of English poetry and English prosody. But they have hardly yet been thoroughly treated, and in particular both are in very great want of competent, complete, and critical editing.

They overlap each other in a rather curious fashion, especially from our point of view. Hawes, quite of the early Renaissance in matter, and with a strong influence forward on Spenser, is in prosody purely Chaucerian as

far as intention goes; he tries hardly anything but rhyme-royal, with a little couplet, etc. Of Barclay much the same may be said, with *distinguos* and qualifications. But Skelton, in part of his work deserving the same description without the forward note, is in another almost *sui generis*, and, at any rate, quite the prince of the queer genus to which he belongs, which is quite different from theirs. Moreover, it so happens that the great interest of this genus is prosodic. In one sense they are all Chaucerians, though very dilapidated and broken-down Chaucerians. In another they are all doggerelists; but here Skelton parts company from them, for he means doggerel as well as does it, and they do not.

Hawes.

Hawes,[1] who is never tired of referring to the three masters of the fifteenth century—Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate—and who makes special reference to the third and last as *his* "master," though he can hardly have known Lydgate personally, is, as has been said, uncompromisingly Chaucerian in his metres. What he wants in range, however, he by no means makes up in accomplishment; and this is all the more remarkable in that, with all his dull didactics, he has more strictly poetical quality than Skelton, and very much more than Barclay. He is in fact the capital, and, in a sense, final example of this strange *débâcle* of the forces of English poetry from the formal and metrical point of view. Not even the Teutonic classification-mongering, which (even there with a confessed margin of defeat) attempts to spread a veil over Lydgate's deformities and delinquencies, could do anything for Hawes, except by processes of tampering which are as yet mainly restricted to Biblical criticism. Allow as much as you like for the infirmity of the early press (we do not seem to have any MSS. of Hawes), and the rules of his verse still appear to be not proved by, but made up of,

[1] We have no complete Hawes, and it is strange that Mr. Arber's edition of the *Example of Virtue* (which was said to be actually printing, many years ago) has never appeared. At present the most accessible things are Wright's *Pastime of Pleasure* (not quite complete) in the Percy Society series (London, 1845), and the Abbotsford Club *Conversion of Swearers* (Edinburgh, 1854). The *Example* is also in rhyme-royal.

exceptions. After long years of study of the subject, the present writer has given up as hopeless the assignment of any thoroughly satisfactory reason for this chaos, except on the supposition, which is indeed all but a certainty, that English pronunciation itself had got into a hopeless muddle. A further supposition (which seems at least extremely probable, and connects itself logically with the former) may be that the tendency to doggerel at the worst, to extremely free and slurring measures at the best, which we notice throughout the time, though it did not, in Hawes, manifest itself as it does in Skelton, had affected his graver verse.

The *Conversion of Swearers.*

At any rate, it is merely childish or pedantic bravado to contest the *fact.* Hawes's originals are *rarissima*; but we possess, in the Abbotsford Club reprint of the short *Conversion of Swearers*, something like a facsimile, and the first stanza of this—which is a distinctly favourable example of Hawes's rhythm, if not of his poetry—may be worth analysing:—

> The frutefull sentence and the noble werkes,
> To our doctrine wryten in olde antyquyte
> By many gret and right notable clerkes,
> Grounded on reason and hygh autoryte,
> Dyde gyve us example by good moralyte
> To folowe the trace of trouth and ryghtwysnes,
> Leuynge our synne and mortall wrechednes.

Here it will be observed that, in order to get the *strict* decasyllable at all, we have to resort to synalœpha, synizesis, and the like—"to our doc-," "-ten in old," "-son and high," "-low the trace"—or else we must allow downright trisyllabic feet. In this last there would not, according to the views of English prosody taken in this book, be anything much to object to if it were likely to have been meant, and if it made good metre, which it hardly does. But line five is different. Here you have the choice between a frank Alexandrine, or the clash of two trisyllabic feet, "us exam|ple by good," which are not good examples even in themselves, and which are made worse by their coming together. Taking the whole

stanza, we can only say that if Hawes meant these licences it is a rather ugly and clumsy one, and that if he did not, it is sheer chaos. And we may add that the taste of the best poets at other times has always eschewed free trisyllabic admixture in stanza, excellent as it is in blank verse and couplet.[1]

But when we look elsewhere, even in this short poem, which seems to be written with especial care, we can have very little doubt that there *are* Alexandrines, and pretty bad ones, such as this—

Upon every syde with danger is iniquity,

where, even to get the Alexandrine itself, we have to allow two slurs, or two trisyllabic feet, and mere finger-counting might almost make a fourteener.

In this short poem, however, Hawes, as has been said, or his printer, or his editor, has been pretty careful. His *magnum opus* (or at least that one of his *magna opera* which is accessible) is in a very different condition. It may be said, with the utmost deliberation, that of all English poems which can be brought into comparison with it, not merely for bulk but for merit of sorts, the *Pastime of Pleasure* is in the most dishevelled, out-at-heel, and generally slatternly condition, as regards metre and almost all the constituents of prosody in the wide sense. The writer seems to have availed himself of every licence that Chaucer, and of most licences that Lydgate, takes (including the "break-back" which Lydgate's editors assign to him as intentional), with a great many of which Chaucer at least would never have dreamt. And he puts

The *Pastime of Pleasure.*

[1] The *Conversion* contains some prosodic quaintnesses of the kind which (see *infra*) relieves fifteenth-century heaviness, in the following poem, advancing from monosyllabic to decasyllabic lines—

See
The
Be
} kynde,

My swete blode
On the roode
Dyde thee good
} my broder.

Agayne
My Payne
Reteyne
} in mynde,

etc. etc. etc.

and then declining by the same stages to a monosyllabic end.

them together without the faintest attention to that rhythmical "total effect" in which Chaucer hardly ever fails, or with a complete failure to achieve it. He has lines of almost every syllabic length, from eight to twelve, or even fourteen; he takes almost complete and entirely promiscuous licence of accentuation; he constantly commits the peculiarly ugly fault of rhyming words on non-correspondent syllables. The final *e* he seems to regard as a mere makeshift and stopgap—to be neglected generally, as of course by this time was the custom of English poets, but to be revived and shoved in wherever the metre requires mending. Partly as the result of all this, and partly by the additional assistance of some imp of inharmony, he manages to communicate an impression of general hobbling, of what Aristotle calls the "arrhythmon," which is quite wonderful when one finds how harmonious he can be. For instance, almost at the opening of the poem he has a stanza beginning with four lines, which do not come far short of his great pupil Spenser in metrical adequacy to the ear and in the sound-picture presented (I purposely make the unimportant modernisations in spelling, not one of which affects the metre in the very slightest degree, that the reader may not be "put off" by the older forms):—

I saw come riding in a valley far
A goodly lady, environèd about
With tongues of fire as bright as any star,
That fiery flambs[a] incensèd[b] alway out.

[a] "Flames," but with an extra sense of flickering. [b] Like incendiary, "blazed."

This is really very good indeed. But how does the author go on—

Which I behelde and was in great doubt,
Her palfrey swift running as the wind,

where the whole metrical vehicle breaks down, and where, to get the ten bare syllables, you have first to allow "beheldè," and then to save the *è* from elision by the cæsura licence; while in the second line you cannot do even this, and must allow the detestable Lydgatian break-back, which ruins any symphony.

These examples, which could be supplemented to any extent, and may be shortly so in a note,[1] should surely make it superfluous to say much more about Hawes. Part of his trouble (as with all the fifteenth-century men of the regular literary tradition) is no doubt due to the "aureate" diction, which he *will* drag in by sackfuls and scatter about in handfuls. But this cannot bear the whole of the burden. Once more, it is quite clear that these poets either set totally wrong ideals before them, or were entirely unable to put in practice the better ideals which they had; that if they did not misread their Lydgate they certainly misread their Chaucer; and that even where they did not misread him (as in the case of the final *e*) they misapplied what they read. And further, it will be almost impossible to explain even these explanations without the further supposition, which once more is all but a certainty, that both orthography and orthoepy were, in the English of the time, at such a point of transition, and blending, and experiment, that they gave no solid basis or standard at all—that the materials crumbled under the hand of the verse-builder as he used them, and made matters still worse for the untempered mortar of his syntax and the treacherous line and trowel of his metre.[2]

[1] For instance, *Pastime of Pleasure*, p. 24 (Wright):—

> And gramer is the fyrst foundement
> Of every science to have construccyon:
> Who knewe gramer without impediment
> Shoulde perfytely have intelleccyon
> Of a lytterall cense and moralysacion.
> To construe every thynge intentifly,
> The worde is gramer wel and ordinatly.

Meditation of the Coronation of Henry VIII., Abbotsford Club:—

> The ryght eloquent poete and monke of Bery [Lydgate]
> Made many fayre bookes as it is probable
> From all derkenes to lyght our emyspery,
> Whose virtuous pastime was moche comendable.
> Presentynge his bookes gretely profytable
> To your worthy predecessour the V King Henry,
> Which regystred is in the courte of memory.

[2] Hawes's riding rhyme in the Gobelive part (chaps. xxix. and xxxii.) is a good deal less poetical than the best of his stanzas, but prosodically rather better than the worst of them. He has secured some spirit, but not much music.

Barclay.

What has been said of Hawes may be said, and underlined, of Barclay.[1] He is much less of a poet, but he is not much more, or any more, of a prosodist. Like Hawes he affects chiefly rhyme-royal and couplet, and as in him, but even more, the individual lines are crowded with what *may* be trisyllabic feet in a manner which suggests radical uncertainty as to what measure he is really aiming at, and so lends itself to general remarks later. But he has very little prosodic value, and some extracts in a note will, after what has been said of Hawes, probably suffice.[2]

Skelton.

John Skelton[3] is not to be dealt with so rapidly. The more serious part of him indeed deserves, and can be justly despatched by, exactly the same remarks which have been given to Hawes in detail, and repeated succinctly on Barclay. There is the same painful attempt to keep up with the requirements of a difficult *ars poetica*, and the same stumblings and tumblings as if his head were "tottie of his swinke." But elsewhere, and sometimes in the very same piece—notably in the *Crown of*

[1] *He* has had nearly as much recent editing as he deserves in Mr. T. H. Jamieson's handsome edition of the *Ship of Fools* (2 vols. Edinburgh, 1874), and the Spenser Society's black-letter reprint of the *Eclogues* and the *Mirror of Good Manners* (privately printed, 1885). In default of the latter, Fairholt's Percy Society edition of the *Fifth Eclogue*, with extracts from the others (London, 1847), will be found very useful. I use all three.

[2] What thinge is more abhomynable in Goddes syght
Than vicious age: certaynly no thynge.
It is eke worldly shame whan thy corage and myght
Is nere dekayed, to kepe thy lewde lyvynge,
And by example of the, thy yonge children to brynge
Into a vicious lyfe: and all goodnes to hate.
Alas, Age! thus thou art the Fendes bate.
Ship of Fools, i. 44.

But or they enter if they have learned nought,
Afterwarde is cunning the least part of their thought.
In court it is counted vice to have science,
And counted for rebuke for to have eloquence,
Thus have men cunning great heavines and payne
Beholding themselves in court had in disdayne.
Third Eclogue, Spenser Society, p. 27, col. 2.

[3] He exists most accessibly in (1) the edition, printed by C. Davis, London, 1736, which I use; (2) Chalmers; (3) Dyce's edition (London, 1843). The last is, of course, the best, but is not now very common.

Laurel—he shows quite different prosodic symptoms, and it is these which give him his great and peculiar, if somewhat questionable, place in the history of English prosody, as the Chaucer of doggerel from one point of view, and as the great illustrator and commentator of the staggering state of non-doggerel poetry in his own time from another.

His "doggerel."

"Doggerel," as a word, is as old as Chaucer himself,[1] and, according to the more than competent authority of Professor Skeat, "of unknown origin," though, I suppose, there can be no great rashness in connecting it with that uncomplimentary use of the name of a most respectable animal, which exists in *caninus* as far back as Varro, and in metaphors and insinuations as much farther back as the Greek of Homer and the Hebrew of the Prophets. The thing is common in most languages, and shows itself in two main ways, either by the application to regular metrical forms of words misused and misvalued, as in the Latin of Commodian, or by breaking loose from those forms (or breaking them into malformations) to suit the value of the words, which themselves are often tampered with in their turn. This latter is the variety of which Skelton is the first Poet-Laureate in English, whatever he may have been in another sense of that disputed *honorificabilitudinitas*.

To this eccentricity Middle and Modern English verse, from its very nature, as explained in all the foregoing pages, is almost congenitally inclined; and *involuntary* doggerel—that is to say, the failure to reach the verse-norm, or the excessive use, in endeavouring to reach it, of syllabic equivalence and variation—has always been present with us, and has been abundantly illustrated by our examples. Such verse as that of *Gamelyn* in particular escapes it but narrowly, though it does escape it; and, when the alliterative revival reached its later and less genuine states, there was a special temptation to adopt a mere "patter" system, in which the ideal of the accent-prosodists was reached and

[1] The Host, of *Sir Thopas*. For more on its kinds see Appendix.

bettered, by reliance *solely* on "strong" syllables, with any number of weak ones taking hold of their skirts, and the more of both the merrier.

It is, however, almost impossible to read Skelton, providing as he does ample examples of both kinds, without seeing that his doggerel is, *for him*, essentially an "escapement." He is not determined to it by considerations of matter, for though *Elinor Rumming* and other things might give colour to such a supposition, the little poems to girls in the *Crown of Laurel*, than which Prior himself has nothing more graceful and delicate, as far as the matter goes, negative it at once and finally. It is not that he is absolutely unable to write the statelier verse; he can now and then do it nearly as well as Hawes at his best, and always as well as Barclay.[1] But it is quite evident that with his quicker, more restless, more subtle wit and intelligence, he feels, constantly and acutely, the *gêne*, the constraint and irksomeness, of these metres to an intolerable extent. He wants to run up and down all the gamut from aureate to familiar diction; to get quick changes of verse and rhyme and cadence; to have elbow-room and finger-openings. And he cannot get these in the adaptation of the ill-settled vocabulary and pronunciation of the time to rhyme-royal or couplet. So he breaks away into "Skeltonics."

The "Skeltonic" verse.

The exact origin of this form must be matter of guess-work; but it can be guessed at not quite so unprofitably as is sometimes the case. We have noticed, and shall notice, a certain growing tendency to internal rhyme: and this necessarily breaks up long verses in fact, if not always in appearance or overt practice. By a curious coincidence both the capital poems of the fifteenth century (*v. infra*)

[1] Here is a fair average specimen, neither best nor worst:—

> I callynge to mynde the great auctoryte
> Of poets olde, whiche full craftily,
> Under as coverte termes as coulde be,
> Can touche a trouth, and cloke subtylly
> With fresche utterance full sentencyously;
> Dyverse in style some spared not vyce to wryte, [wyte?]
> Some of mortalitie nobly dyd endyte.
>
> Prologue to *Bouge of Court*, st. 2.

the *Nutbrowne Mayde* and the great *Carol*, are or can be arranged in very short lines or linekins.[1] Now irregularity in such very short lines is less observable or more manageable, as the phrase may be preferred, than in very long ones; and both metre and rhyme are much easier to manage in an informal fashion. Upon these facts Skelton fastened, and, either by deliberate experiment or in sheer process of practice, hit upon a vehicle[2] generally homogeneous in plan but susceptible of considerable minor variations. Sometimes, for instance in *Philip Sparrow*, the verse runs for a long time in almost exact couplets or triplets of four syllables, extended now and then to six, with the iambic cadence well enough marked, and nothing particularly fantastic (*except* the shortness of metre) about it. But the temptations and capacities of the form were often too strong for him to resist. In his more courtly and less impish moods, as in the poem to Margery Wentworth, he adopts rondel forms. Sometimes he runs over a wide range of syllabic lengths—from four to ten at least—with plentiful substitution of anapæsts. He has "breaks" of the same rhyme, instead of mere couplets or triplets, running up to a dozen. And, partly for the sake of this rhyme and of the alliteration which he also affects, partly it may be to give the grotesque and harlequin effect at which he more and more aims, he falls into the habit

[1] Compare also the quaint monosyllabic and other batches of the example quoted above from Hawes.

[2] Here are three examples from *The Crown*, from *Why come ye not to Court*, and from *Elinour* :—

I.

Mirry Margaret
As midsomer flower,
Gentyll as faucoun
Or hauke of the tower—
With solace and gladness,
Much mirth and no madness,
All good and no badness :—
So joyously,
So maidenly,
So womanly.
Her demenyng
In every thyng
Far far passyng
That I can indite
Or suffyce to wrighte.

II.

For I make you sure
Where truth is abhord,
It is a plain record
That there wants grace
In whose place
Doth occupy
Full ungraciously
Fals flattery,
Fals treachery,
Fals brybery,
Subtle Sym Sly,
With mad folye ;
For who can best lye
He is best set by.

III.

But to make up my tale,
She brueth noppy ale,
And makethe thereof sale
To travellers, to tinkers,
To sweaters, to swinkers,
And all good ale-drinkers,
That will nothing spare
But dryncke till they stare
And bring themselves bare,
With now away the mare
And let us slay Care,
As wise as an hare.

either of positively inventing words, or of selecting and heaping together the most out-of-the-way and burlesque examples that he can find.[1]

Now the comic effect of this is often good ; and even for the lighter kind of serious poetry it is, as has been hinted, not improper. But it is evidently liable to degenerate into mere extravaganza, if not into mere nonsense-verse, and it is, at its best, a little below the dignity of art. Except as an exception it never could be relished ; and with the same proviso one may say that it never could have been even thought of, unless the existing state of regular and formal poetry was profoundly unsatisfactory. To understand Skelton and Skelton's imitators thoroughly, we must not only look at the degeneration of Chaucerian verse in the hands of such men as Lydgate and Occleve, of Hawes and Barclay and Skelton himself, but we must look further to younger contemporaries, to Wyatt and Surrey. We shall see how even they, with higher poetic gifts than any one of these, with classical and foreign models to help them, and with all the afflatus of the new learning and its literature, have to feel their way, and sometimes do not succeed in finding it, amid the difficulties of pronunciation and of prosody. And so we cannot, till we have treated them, make reasonable interim conclusion even as to this part of the matter.

At the same time, he ought to have credit, not merely for his constant or frequent lightness, and for his not rare union of lightness itself and grace, but for the remarkable variety and spirit of his numerous compositions. This variety and this spirit are as noticeable prosodically as otherwise. In the *Crown of Laurel* (its rhyme-royal part) he can be heavy, and he is perhaps never consummate, but his best stanzas are not contemptible. The linguistic mishmash of *Speak Parrot*—English, Scots, Irish, Welsh,

[1] He calls Miss Isabel Pennell "reflaring rosabell" ; invents (?) the wonderful word "hermoniac" to rhyme to "simoniac" ; drags in the oddest of the logical mnemonics ("frisesomorum") ; salutes Queen Katharine as a "peerless pomegranate" ; and in *Elinour Rumming* runs the Scotch flyting poets hard in uncomely jargon.

gibberish Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, what not—finds a prosody not ill-fitted for it. The varieties of the Skeltonic itself are far from accidental, and very well worth study. The noble Latin refrain of the *Dirge on Edward IV.*—

Quia ecce nunc in pulvere dormio,

is not so very ill-parted with the English decasyllabic onzains, *ababacaccdc*, which it completes into douzains with *d* rhyme in *dormio*. And some of the other religious pieces—for instance "Time is a thing"—are almost free from the uncertainty of much of the serious verse. The fifteenth century, with all its shortcomings, seldom forgot the *quatuor novissima*, and they exercised their effect of sobering and steadying in this case also.

CHAPTER III

BALLADS AND OTHER FOLK POETRY—MISCELLANEOUS

The "Ballad Question" not ours—Ballad metre very much ours—Its history and qualities—The original fourteener—*Chevy Chase*—*Gamelyn*—*The Nut-brown Maid*—The great *Carol*—The Suffolk Dirge—Miscellanea: songs and carols—Miscellanea: longer works.

The "Ballad Question" not ours.

THE subject of the present chapter is of the very greatest importance to our whole enquiry; and the difficulties which may seem to beset it are in most cases, though not in all, more apparent than real. Here, indeed, more than almost anywhere, we should be glad of precise dates, and here, almost more than anywhere, we are denied them. Here certainly, not less than elsewhere, we should be glad of precise information as to authorship, and here, again, we have it less than anywhere. Yet there are, as we shall see, compensations and consolations even in these respects. And in others the dangers and difficulties are sometimes again like those of romance, which simply disappear when they are boldly faced and passed. For instance, the much and hotly debated question of the origin of ballads, whether they represent disintegrated epic and romance, or whether epic and romance are conglomerates of them in a prehistoric condition, hardly concerns us at all, is at any rate altogether "previous" for us. We might, indeed, by a sort of side-wind, contribute a good deal towards the settlement of this question ourselves, but that settlement has extremely little to do with our problems. For what is certain is, that we have no complete ballads before at least the end of the fourteenth

century (putting those political poems which have been dealt with already aside), and that the fragments which do exist adjust themselves with perfect ease to our theories, whether they do or do not to others, without pronouncing on the question of descent at all.

Ballad metre very much ours.

The predominance of a single form is here so remarkable, that for once we may forego our usual practice of preliminary induction, and begin with this form itself. The ballad quatrain, or common measure, is perhaps the most definitely English—blood and bone, flesh and marrow—of all English metres. It comes the most naturally of all to an English tongue and an English ear; it adapts itself with sublime indifference to the highest poetry and to the lowest doggerel; it takes the tone and colour of every age, from the ethereal raptures of the seventeenth century to the grovelling prose-verse of the mid-sixteenth, or the namby-pamby sing-song of the eighteenth; it is at once Protean in its outward variations, and Akinetic in its abiding personality. There is nothing quite like it in any other language, its Scandinavian and Teutonic congeners having, as a rule,[1] much less range, while the Latin poetics prefer "purity" of line. From Donne to Tate and Brady in one order of comparison, and from Robert of Gloucester to Rossetti in another, across whatever gulfs of gift and sands of time, through all changes of diction, pronunciation, versification, manners, tastes, culture, and everything else, it has held the grip that it established almost from the very first moment, when the formative principle of foot-measurement met the materially chaotic abundance of Old English rhythm, and impressed itself thereon.

Its history and qualities.

The reasons of this extraordinary power and duration are apparent to some extent *a priori*, at least from that rather illegitimate but useful combination of *a priori* and *a posteriori* consideration which is at least as useful as it

[1] Of course there are exceptions, especially in Heine. But then it has been maintained, with much show of reason, that Heine was really an English poet, who happened to be born in Germany of Jewish extraction. This out-of-jointness would account for his dislike of his real poetical country, and his love of its poetry. As to Scandinavian, I may be wrong.

is illegitimate. The common measure, or rather that fourteener of which it is an early and inevitable couplet adaptation, possesses in advance the full requirements of metre, and is ready at once to add to them those of rhyme. But it is, at the same time, the nearest actual, and almost the nearest possible, approach to the original Anglo-Saxon line or pair of hemistichs. The octosyllabic couplet, which was at first preferred, and which has always preserved a strong position, differs from this line in the more or less exact equality of the hemistichs, whereas the Old English pair rather inclined to shorten the second;[1] but the fourteener retains this relationship. The actual syllabic length is far from being widely different on an average: the fourteener giving about as much additional elbow-room as the decasyllable (the other great, but later, Middle and Modern English staple) gives a little less. But the main inherent or latent gift of the measure—when the long line is once regularly split into two, and these two exercise the new right of metrical-rhythmical equivalence, subject to the foot-system—is its astonishing variety, vigour, and subtlety of "lift" and "lilt." You may run the first half to twelve syllables or four anapæsts; the second to nine syllables, or three of the same feet. You may, at an extreme pinch, cut down the first to four and the second to three, or even lower, by the aid of monosyllabic or simply pause-feet. The quatrain may become a quintet, or even more, by doubling one of the longer lines. Its adaptabilities, in short, are infinite.

The original fourteener.

Gifts and graces of this kind never take long to be found out; a pretty metre, and an obliging, is no more likely to escape notice than a pretty and obliging girl. We have observed some early examples of the common measure (or of an "ettling at" it) above, and may notice some more below. The extreme ease, too, with which it

[1] This is sometimes questioned, and the modern practice of printing A.S. verse in long lines, sometimes without the central mark, may obscure the fact. But I may repeat that I have tested very widely, and that, in *normal* lines, I believe it to be *as a tendency* pretty certain.

adapts itself to catching and well-marked musical accompaniment must have had much to do with the spread of it. But probably its great literary or quasi-literary diffuser was the use of it in the collection of Saints' Lives, by Robert of Gloucester and his imitators and followers. These things, as everybody who knows anything about literary history is aware, were the popular literature of the Middle Ages; they corresponded (with no rivals except the romance, of which they were in fact a variety, perhaps the original) to the drama later, and the novel later still. The very earliest examples that we have of them are in the fourteener, *i.e.* common measure "folded up." It will be worth while to take the E.E.T.S. edition[1] of this text, not younger than 1290 at least, and probably older, and to show how, at every dip, we find a form which, rough in the original, loses that roughness completely when modernised without altering a word, and so shows the perennial quality in it. Take the very first line-couplet,[2] and it makes a pattern ballad-stanza :—

> The holy rood y-foundè was
> As I you now may tell.
> Constantine the Emperor
> Much heathen folk gan quell.

There is the norm, unaltered in the slightest degree from the thirteenth century to the twentieth.

But the study of the old fourteener and its obvious developments has many more lessons than this for us. By degrees we find out that almost every possible variation of the "common measure," as well as the norm of it, exists either directly, or as suggested by the changes inevitable when the final *e* was dropped. Take, again (it

[1] *The Early South-English Legendary* (Laud MS. 108; ed. Horstmann, London, 1887). This and other E.E.T.S. volumes, with Dr. Horstmann's earlier German publications, *Alt-Englische Legenden* (Paderborn, 1875), *Sammlung Alt-Englischer Legenden* (Heilbronn, 1878), *Alt-Englische Legenden: Neue Folge* (Heilbronn, 1881), are the great storehouses of the early form. I could write a chapter, and not a short one, on their material.

[2] As exactly reproduced (*ed. cit. sup.* p. 1) :—

> þe holie rode i-founde was : ase ich eov nouthe may telle.
> Costantyn þe Aumperour : muche heþene folk gan a-quelle.

will be seen how little need of picking and choosing there is) the very next (third) line—

For huy ore louerd jesu crist : to strongue dethe broughte.

Now those who originally read or recited this second part sounded it (perhaps not quite so decidedly)

to strong*y* death*y* brought*y*.

But when their grandsons or great-grandsons took to pronouncing it

To strong death brought,

they found, consciously or not, that they had not spoilt the metre at all. The foot-divisions remained, and the heavy syllables "strong," "death," "brought," carried pause enough after them to fill these divisions. And so the other way. Take the first half of line twenty-four—

To burie the rode op-on Calvarie hulle : ase huy nomen heom to rede.

"To bu|ry the rood | upon Cal|vary hill" is a line of eleven syllables with the three last feet anapæsts. And we have already had the "crushing together" of the first, which is such an important point in

Con|stantine | the Em|peror.

Do not let any one say that this was pronounced "them|peror." If it was (which is not certain), they soon knew better.

It requires, indeed, no eyes of lynx or of Lynceus to discover, in this probably oldest example, almost every variety of this versatile metre. Here is the first line with anacrusis *and* catalexis :—

(49) Thul|ke time | that Jes|us.

Here one with the anapæst in the second place :—

(18) In coun|sel he was | to me | a-knowe.

Here one with anapæst in second and third :—

(47) And said|en if a|ny man ther|of wot.

Here (spelling only modernised) one with anapæst in the

first place of the second half (one of the finest of all, though Guest, in the very altitude of his incomprehensibleness, finds "very little to recommend it") :—

(116) And the rood | therein | she brought.

In fact I do verily believe that, with a little patience, almost every possible form may be discovered in these earliest examples, either according to the prosodic values of the time, or to those which the language was more or less shortly to prefer. Thus early metrical equivalence, the result of the marriage of Romance form and English matter, has established itself for good and all, and has taken this most popular, most apparently artless, yet in reality endlessly artistic measure to be its peculiar province and ground of exhibition.

Chevy Chase.

Let us now, in our usual fashion, analyse what, passing over little more than a century,[1] is certainly the most famous, and what there is good reason for regarding as probably the oldest example of the ballad itself, *Chevy Chase.* Even this, as perhaps most, and certainly many probable readers know, we do not possess in any MS. form older than the middle of the *sixteenth* century. But all its characteristics are acknowledged, even by jealous

[1] During which the romance-measure had come forward and a little obscured, but not in the least obliterated, this. These Saints' Lives are, as it were, ballads in the matrix. But there is a very remarkable one—separated, and in no very embryo condition—the "Judas" poem which Wright printed from a thirteenth-century MS. at Trinity College, Cambridge, at i. 144 of *Reliquiae Antiquae* (it is also in Child's *Ballads*, i. 242 ; v. 288) :—

Hit wes upon a scere-Thorsday | that ure Loverd aros,
Ful milde were the wordes | he spec to Judas :
"Judas, thou most to Jursalem | oure mete for to bugge,
Thritti platen of selver | thou bere up othi rugge.
Thou comest fer ithe brode strete, | fer ithe brode strete ;
Summe of thine tunesmen | ther theo meist i-mete."
I-mette wid is soster | the swikele wimmon ;
"Judas, thou were wrthe me | stende[a] the wid ston,
For the false prophete | that tou bilevest upon."

[a] Or "wrthe | me stende," if any one prefers it.

In general accomplishment this is about midway between the earlier long *Lives* and *Gamelyn*. But there are some most noteworthy things in it : the abbreviation (here as elsewhere, if not *metri gratia* yet *metro suadente*) of Jerusalem ; the interesting doubling of "fer ithe brode strete" ; and, above all, the extension of couplet to triplet, of quatrain to sixain, with which I have concluded the extract. (See also note at end of chapter.)

critics, to be much older; it is the kind of thing which passes from memory to memory, disfigured a little, but not radically changed; and it may probably not be so very different from the original, which, in its turn, may not be so very much younger than the famous Border fight itself. Corrupt, clumsy, stupid sometimes, as the actual version is, it is very remarkable that the genius of the metre is still active in it, and has saved it to a great extent from the sing-song which, as we know from printed texts, was actually coming upon contemporary examples at the time this copy was written. The well-known opening, though spelt in a manner which is rather ignorant than archaic, requires nothing but the knowledge that to this day Cheviot is locally pronounced "Chivot" to make it a perfectly smooth though widely varied and equivalenced specimen :—

The Per|se owt | off northom | barlonde ‖ an avowe | to God |
mayd he, |
That he | wold hunte | in the moun|tayns ‖ of Chyviat | within |
days three |
In the magger of doughte dogles and all that ever with him be.[1]

Here the first and second lines (half-lines) are exact, with one trisyllabic foot in each; the third is catalectic, with a trisyllabic third foot; and the fourth is as the second.

Nor is it at all surprising to find that this opening stanza itself is a sixain or triplet, not a couplet or quatrain, for the expansiveness of the stanza, as we have noted, is one of its great qualities.[2]

And it is hardly ever difficult, without any violence, to

[1] I take Professor Skeat's text in his *Specimens*. I venture to think him unnecessarily scornful of the expletive "and" which appears "and a vow" in MS., though I have personally little prosodic doubt that "an avow" is the right reading here. The conjunction has a peculiar dramatic force in English (cf. "and so," etc.); and it comes in excellently to give the poet his trisyllabic quaver and quiver when he wants it.

[2] Professor Skeat thinks from the rhyme-quartet "dear," "clear," "sheer," "dear," in 10-13, that a complete quatrain of long lines was aimed at. It is quite possible—that form of metre is frequent. And it is by no means *im*possible that there is uncertainty between 8, 6 and 8, 8—reversion to the original "parting of the ways." (See next example.)

reduce the actual form (extraordinarily bad as the copy is) to what is at any rate passable and what may be the authentic version, so strong is the impress of the metre itself spite of all defacements. Thus l. 7, a mere gurgle of words at first sight—

With xv c. archares bold off blood and bone, the wear chosen owt of shyars iii,

is quite evidently a muddle of two forms—

With archers bold *of blood and bone*—
They *were* chosen of shirès three,

and

With *fifteen hundred* archers bold,
Chosen *out* of shirès three,

either of which is as good verse as ear and heart can wish.

The age of the piece is partly shown by the occasional necessity of the final *e*—

The drivers thorough the woodès went,

and sometimes by the certainly genuine character (so easily distinguishable from that fashionable later) of the alliteration—

Bowmen bickered upon the bent,

and

Greyhounds thorough the grevis glent.

But through all drawbacks and obstacles the momentum of the metre forces its way. Again and again we come to lines and groups of lines such as, out of English poetry, it is almost impossible to find, for that "blood-stirring" effect which Sir Philip Sidney felt:—

With spear and bill and brand it was
A mighty sight to see—
Hardier men both of heart nor hand
Were not in Christenty.
They were twenty hundred spearmen good
Withouten any fail—
They were born along by the water of Tweed
In the bounds of Tividale.

If anybody does not feel like Sir Philip after reading that

he is no Englishman; and if, not being an Englishman, he does not feel like Sir Philip for the moment, he is either a very cold-blooded person, or no judge of poetry, or (most probably) both.

Even if, however, we are (without, as it seems to me, the least probability) to deprive the poor fifteenth century of the credit of *Chevy Chase*, the oldest of the "Robin Hood" ballads, such as "Robin and Gandalin," cannot be much younger than its time, and may even be a very little older. For, as we have seen, *Gamelyn* itself, which the other name so easily suggests, often approaches "common measure" nearly. In "Robin and Gandalin" the quatrain has a fifth line refrain, but this is obviously detachable, and probably added for musical purposes chiefly. Otherwise it is quite as normal as can be wished, and admits of extension to a sixain, etc.

Gamelyn.

Of the miscellaneous interests of the *Tale of Gamelyn*—its connection with *As You Like it*; its connection with Robin Hood; the egregious absurdity which made somebody mistake it for the "Coke's Tale" in Chaucer; and others not a few—we must not say anything here. But it would never do to leave it with only casual references, and it is essentially a long ballad—one of those which accept the title indifferently with the other title of a short romance, and serve as something of a support to those who think that ballads themselves are broken-down epics of the romance-kind—a notion which excites great ails and angers in yet other not less celestial minds. It consists of nearly a thousand long or some eighteen hundred short lines, which in the first case are, at first sight, metrically rather irregular but rhythmically very passable fourteeners, and in the latter fall into ballad quatrains, with only the second and fourth lines rhymed, but these rhymed with great exactness and regularity. This, from some points of view, may seem to be the only thing in the entire scheme of versification that can deserve either the adjective exact or the adjective regular, and the accentualists probably regard *Gamelyn* as one of the strongest of their strongholds. But this is a delusion.

As a basis of discussion, it will be well to give below a substantial block from the beginning.[1]

Now on this there are several remarks to make. The central dot is a great boon for the accentualists; it connects *Gamelyn* with old English in appearance, and it is quite possible—indeed, very nearly certain—that it has a real and not only an apparent connection with the "derry-down" tune or recitative with which so popular a thing was sure to be accompanied when addressed to an audience. But when you come to "excuss" the piece a little—to shake it out of its adventitious folds, and look how it hangs naturally, and examine its texture, several other things will emerge. One is, that if you compare it, say with Robert of Gloucester in his liveliest passages (that given above for instance, or the admirable story of Dunstan and the Devil, or the death of Becket, which was a little long for citation here), you will find that where Robert stumbles and breaks pace the *Gamelyn* man does not; his is the freest of hand-gallops, but not the sternest of judges can bar him from the prize for false step or false note. In the second, you will find a very large proportion of full-stops, and an almost invariable presence of stop of some kind at the end of each pair of couplets; that is to say, in other words, that the piece is really in ballad-quatrain. (I do not suppose any one denies this, but there are different ways of reaching the same place,

[1] Litheth and lesteneth · and herkeneth aright,
And ye schulle heere a-talking · of a doughty knight;
Sire Johan of Boundys · was his righte name,
He cowde of norture ynough · and mochil of game.
Thre sones the knight hadde · that with his body he wan;
The eldest was a moche shrewe · and sone he bigan.
His bretheren loved wel here fader · and of him were agast,
The eldest deserved his fadres curs · and had it at the last.
The goode knight his fader · livede so yore,
That deth was comen him to and handled him full sore.
The goode knight cared sore · syk ther he lay,
How his children scholde · liven after his day.
He hadde ben wyde-wher · but no housbond he was,
Al the lond that he hadde · it was verrey purchas.
Fayn he wolde it were · dressed among hem alle,
That ech of hem hadde his part · as it mighte falle.

Works of Chaucer, ed. Skeat, iv. 645.

and they are not all equally paths of peace.) Thirdly, and most important of all, you will find that, whether you take it in couplet or whether you take it in quatrain, the central stop will neither make nor mar the foot-scansion, equivalenced with all the freedom of the casing air, but not with the least licentiousness. Sometimes there will have to be a "pause-foot" (or half-foot) at the break—that is to say, at the second line of the quatrain; but by no means always. Sometimes these pauses will fall within the second, and more seldom in the first half (first or second, third or fourth *line*). But when they do it will be almost always (I think I might say always) still possible, as it will be always elsewhere, to neglect the dot, and *scan the whole line* (double line), *even on strictly metrical principles, as decasyllable, Alexandrine, or fourteener.*[1] The importance of this in connection with the prosodic *débâcle* of the fifteenth century, with the "Poulter's measure," with "the tumbling verse," and so forth, will emerge the more signally the more it is studied. *Gamelyn*, in fact, is a master-key which will open every lock that Chaucer and Langland will not, and he is himself—I like to personify him—a link between Chaucer and Langland. Carry these three keys at your girdle and nothing in English prosody will resist them: while no madness of theory that can be safely left out of the madhouse itself, no blindness of apprehension that comes short of total eclipse of sight, can question their genuineness and legitimacy as instruments for dealing with "this English matter, in the English tongue, for Englishmen."

But yet, further, if we shut the ballads in common measure out of sight[2] altogether, the fifteenth century is still a copious contributor of things, in one or two instances consummate, in many pleasing, in all profitable for instruction and correction in our subject. The two

[1] I have scanned long batches in every part of the poem without a failure, and I do not believe that there is a line requiring more than the indulgence which may be demanded in dealing with any MS.

[2] The collections—Percy, Ritson, Hazlitt, Child, etc.—would furnish endless additional illustrations of metre, but perhaps superfluously. And in some of the most beautiful there are troublesome doubts of date.

consummate examples[1] are of course the *Nutbrowne Mayde* and (to some people, perhaps, not so much of course, which is a pity) the carol on the Nativity, "I sing of a maiden."

The charm in non-formal ways of the *Nutbrowne Mayde* needs no dilatation here, but it is very much ours to point out how much of its charm is due to form. The form itself may be said to be the older fourteener or common measure, but divided in its first half, the octosyllable, by a strong middle rhyme and pause, and occasionally, though not necessarily very often, varied, suppled, and lilted by trisyllabic feet. The oldest example of this appears to be the curious "E.I.O." poem noticed above and quoted here below.[2] Another, "Adieu, my dear, The *Nut-brown Maid.*

[1] The extremely beautiful *Quia Amore Langueo* (see Dr. Furnivall's *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*, E.E.T.S. 2nd ed. 1903), which is, in its oldest version (Lambeth MS. 853), apparently of about 1430, is there prosodically regular in eights of eight :—

In a tabernacle of a tour,
As y stood musynge on the moone,
A crowned queene, moost of honour,
Me thoughte y sigh sittinge in trone.
Sche made hir compleynt bi hir oone,
For mannis soule is wrappid in *synne*,
"Y may not leeue mankynde a-loone,"
Quia amore langueo.

(*Synne* is merely a copyist's blunder ; all the other *o* rhymes are right.)

The variant-continuation (*ibid.*), more beautiful still, expatiates into decasyllables, and more, very instructively :—

Loke unto myn handys, man !
These gloves were geuen me whan I hyr sowght ;
They be nat white, but rede and wan,
Embrodred with blode my spouse them bowght ;
They wyll not of[f], I lefe them nowght,
I wowe hyr with them wherever she goe ;
Thes hands full frendly for hyr fowght,
Quia amore langueo.

(Observe in both the *attracted* rhyme of ll. 4, 5.)

This volume contains, especially in the "Short Religious Pieces" from MS. Harl. 7322, much that I should like to comment on, and that illustrates the infinite procession of experiment and metamorphosis.

[2] This extremely remarkable poem occurs in the famous Thornton MS. belonging to the Library of Lincoln Cathedral ; and will be found at p. 80 of Canon Perry's edition of the Religious Poems and Prose-pieces of that MS. for the E.E.T.S. (2nd ed. 1889). The manuscript itself is not thought to be later than 1440; and it is pretty certain that its contents are older, perhaps by a good deal. The assignment of "E.I.O." to Hampole himself, *i.e.* to a time about a century before, I do not think likely ; if so, so much

adieu," is, in the MS. form in which we have it, a little younger than the printed copy of the *Nutbrowne Mayde* itself in Arnold's *Chronicle*, though both of course may be definitely older still.

That the *Maid*[1] is not older than the time when the incubus of the final *e* was disappearing there can be no doubt. I suppose the greatest devotee of that inconvenient appendix[2] does not propose or wish to scan

I musty to the greeny woody go.

---

the better. From the ease and completeness of the double rhyme and the occasional trisyllabic swing, I should not put it as much anterior to the fifteenth century, though we have seen indication of these things as early as the thirteenth, and the first line, with its echo of the well-known watch-word of the Wat Tyler insurrection, may carry us back twenty years before 1400. And there is an older form, shorter by two stanzas, and rougher metrically, in a Cambridge MS., Dd. v. 64 (see Horstmann's *Hampole*, i. 72). It is out of my way to comment on it from any other than a prosodic point of view, though I should like to do so. From that point of view it consists of eight stanzas of twelve lines each, of which the following (the first and third) may serve as specimens :—

When Adam dalfe and Eve spane,
Go spire, if thou may spede,
Whare was than the pride of man
That nowe merres his mede,
Of earth and lame as was Adam,
Makede to noye and nede,
We er, als he, maked to be
Whills we this lyfe sall lede.
With I | and E | borne | er we,
As Sa|lomon | us highte
To tra|uell here | whills we | er fere
As fowl|e unto | the flyghte.
. . . . . .
Ware thou als wysse, praysede in pryce
Als was Salomon,
Wele fairere fude of bane and blude
That was Absalon,
Strengthely and strange to wreke thy wrange
As euer was Sampson,
Thou ne mighte a day, na mare than thay,
The dede withstand allone.
With I | and E | the ded|e to the
Sall come | als I | the ken,
Bot thou | ne wate | in whate | kyn state
Ne how, | ne whare, | ne whenne.

The "lift" of "in whatekyn state" is unmistakable, and it recurs as in st. 6—

Ne la|tyn ne lawe | may helpe | an hawe.

[1] It is, fortunately, too well known and accessible for free quotation to be needful. The oldest version is exactly given in Prof. Skeat's *Specimens*.

[2] By this time inconvenient. Not so, of course, earlier.

But whosoever wrote it had an astonishing mastery of prosody. Strong as is the beat given by the internal rhymes, it has never become monotonous, and the way in which each stanza "lifts" its rhythm as the refrain approaches, like a well-ridden horse taking each fence in his stride, is really wonderful. Never did any verse make its own music better than this. Another point of marvel is the sparing but consummate way in which the trisyllabic feet are managed. Too many (as anybody may see for himself, by inserting expletives in the text) relax the measure too much and so injure the acoustic effect of the rhymes; but none at all would, or might, give an effect of woodenness. Some people, of course, would deny (some people will deny anything) that "be it right" and "ne|ver a dele|" are trisyllabic. I have no doubt of it. Note too the short *sob* which "whither" and "sorrow" communicate to the sixth stanza:—

> Why say ye so? *whither* will ye go? alas! what have ye done?
> All my welfare to *sorrow* and care should change if ye were gone;

and the effect of "heartily" in

> And this I do and pray you lo! as *heartily* as I can.

"So *little* avail" in l. 77, "to *cover* your head and mine" (l. 100), "O my sweet *mother* before *all other*" (l. 17), all have special value where they occur.

The great *Carol*.

No example could possibly be struck off at this day, by the greatest master alive of English versification, to show the mastery of it, better than the *Carol*[1] above

[1] First printed in Wright's *Songs and Carols* (Warton Club, 1856), a book which, with his earlier Percy Society collection similarly entitled (1847), tempts me, as the pair lie before me, to extract and analyse example after example of cunningly combined and sweetly sounding metrification. Thirty years later Mr. Bullen gave it in his *Carols and Poems* (London, 1886). I cannot resist giving it once more:—

> I sing of a maiden
> That is makeless;
> King of all kings
> To her son she owes.
> He came also still
> Where his mother was,
> As dew in April
> That fall[e]th on the grass.

referred to shows that attained by some unknown predecessor, in the most ill-famed and ill-fated period of English poetry. The perfectly managed hand-gallop of the *Nutbrowne Mayde* shows off, and is set off by, the still, small voice—still and small, but infinitely sweet as well as solemn—of this other masterpiece. The rhythm has a distinct trochaic touch in it, a touch common enough in the antenatal days of our literature, and often recovered in modern times, but not very frequent in the middle period. The motion is extraordinarily slow, the sound being suited to the sense with absolute precision. The final feet of each line—which are not so much catalectic in the ordinary sense as monosyllabic, with a very strong pause and stillness to make them up — are still more cunning, and altogether the thing is a wonder. It is also one of the wonders which accord least well with a purely accentual theory of scansion; for if you only attend to "strong" syllables half its beauty vanishes.

The Suffolk dirge.

In fact the accuracy, variety, and music of these minor fifteenth-century poets in this point of the admixture of trisyllabic feet is quite astonishing—all the more so when, on the one hand, we look at the clumsy woodenness of the literary decadents in stricter iambic, and when, on the other, we remember that this sleight itself was about to be lost (save in drama) almost wholly for two centuries, for three well-nigh, as a recognised and estated quality of English poetry. We meet it in the most unlikely places—for instance, in the refrain of the mock-dirge

---

He came also still
To his mother's bower,
As dew in April
That fall[e]th on the flower.
He came also still
Where his mother lay,
As dew in April
That fall[e]th on the spray,
Mother and Maiden
Was never none but she.
Well may such a lady
God's mother be.

O vis superba formae!

for Suffolk [1] which dates itself at the middle of the century. There is something a little fiendish, but altogether artistic and delightful, in the way in which the passing-bell slowness of the first half

For | Jăck | Nāpes' | sōul plă |

suddenly turns head over heels into a carillon of satiric joy and triumph with

-cēbŏ ănd | dīrĭ|gē !

where, as in other places, the resolution of the trochee into a dactyl gives perhaps the only legitimate and successful —certainly the most legitimate and successful—use of this latter foot in English. The penalty and corruption of these trisyllabic indulgences is indeed to be seen in the doggerels which have been and will be surveyed, and it is at least probable that reaction from this had a great deal to do with the partial ostracism of the trisyllabic foot during the great Elizabethan period. But these things will happen.

Miscellanea—songs and carols.

Nor must it be thought that the fifteenth-century achievement is by any means limited to these exercises and excursions in resolution and equivalence—for it has plenty to show in the soberer iambic combinations, more particularly in religious poetry. Halliwell's *Early English Miscellanies* for the Warton Club, and Wright's two volumes of *Carols*, etc., for the same society and its forerunner, the Percy, contain many charming things, only inferior to the two supremities noticed above, and partaking both of the looser and of the stricter adjustment.

The refrain is very noticeable here, as, for instance, in the first of Wright's "Warton" Collection. The quatrain of triplet and single rhyme, either by itself or combined, is particularly common, and there is a tendency to work this into what may be called a half-refrain. The metre of "I sing of a maiden" is found with many slight variations,

[1] See Wright's other collection of *Political Poems* for the Rolls Series (London, 1861), ii. 232 ; also in *Pol., Rel. and Love Poems*, u. s. This collection is another tempting treasure-house of prosodic facts.

tending to lengthen and enlarge, if somewhat to vulgarise it. An extraordinarily effective result of resolution and equivalence is that applied to the Romance-six in XXXVII.—

A new year! a new year! a child was born!

with a curious refrain.[1] The common measure itself is not uncommon.

The Percy *Songs and Carols* give us some more elaborate metres, as, for instance, No. VI., which is almost as complicated as any of the dramatic forms, but in a rather dilapidated condition. It is best arranged as a fourteen-line stave lined 10, 10, 4, 4, 10, 44, 10, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, and rhymed *aabbcddceefggf*.[2] But we also have romance-sixes, a curious six of eights (VII.) rhymed *aaabab*, but completed after two stanzas with a quatrain, one rhyme in six acting as bond throughout, an effective

[1] This, which is evidently in very imperfect condition, Wright prints in couplets only, with the refrain. It runs:—

A new yer, a new yer, a child was y-born
Us for to savyn that al was forlorn,
So blyssid be the tyme.

The fader of Heaven his owyn sone he sent
His kingdom for to cleymyn (*rest wanting*),
So blyssid, etc.

After four of these triplets (or two of the stanzas) the piece lengthens itself into one of the common and often very lovely "Lullaby" forms, trochaic as usual:—

Lullay, lullay, lytil chyld, myn owyn dere fode,
How xalt thou sufferin be naylid on the rode?

with the "Blyssid" refrain as before.

[2] Whilome I present was with my soffreyne,
Ignorawnt I was of dolowr and payne;
For than I lyved
Fre sorow deprived
Of pleasure having abundance and delice.
But now forsoothe
Sore hytt me ruthe,
Fortune contrarythe to my device.
For pencynese
And grett distresse
I am full woo;
Destitute
From all refute
Alone I goo.

combination (X.) of fourteeners with and without internal rhyme,[1] bob-and-wheel tens, Burns metres, common measure triplets, bob fives, fourteener couplets with a six refrain, rhyme-royal, fourteener mono-rhymed quatrains. And in all this class Latin lines or parts of lines are freely mixed with English.

Miscellanea—longer works.

Completeness may demand—what contrast at the same time more engagingly invites—the addition to this chapter of a few words on the miscellaneous fifteenth-century poetry of a more formal kind, the production of the privates or non-commissioned officers of the army of which Lydgate and the rest are the (not exactly great) captains. But the words need be but few. Although some of this poetry is, for better reasons than can always be alleged, accessible with great difficulty, in MSS. or in very rare printed originals, a good deal is available; and I may hope that my readers will, by this time, not be very ready to suspect me either of not having read it, or of being too indolent to give them here the digested results of my reading. The fact is that to do so at any length would certainly be lost labour, though the labour has not been lost which enables me to say this. Most of the minor regular poetry of the time is emphatically but a minor example of what has been sufficiently exemplified and discussed already, either in this Book or in the last. The later metrical romances, whether they have some real poetic quality, like Chester's *Launfal*,[2] or hardly any, like

[1] Thys endris nygth
I saw a sygth,
A stare as bryght as day;
And ever among
A mayden song
Lullay, by by, lullay.

This lovely lady sat and song and to hyr child sayd,
My sone, my broder, my fader der, why lyest thou thus in hayd?
My swete byrd
Thus it ys betyde
That thou be kyng veray;
But nevertheles
I wyl not ses
To syng by, by, lullay!

[2] Ritson's *Ancient Engleish Metrical Romancëes*, i. 170.

Generydes,[1] present no new features. A follower and continuer of Lydgate like Benedict Burgh [2] merely confirms the old rule, that if you put one horse in a crooked furrow and drive the plough accordingly, the furrow resulting will be more crooked still. The degenerate prosaicism of Osbern Bokenam's *Saints' Lives* [3] is not even relieved by any eccentricity of badness. Pretty early in the century (not later than its third decade, it would seem) John Audelay of Shropshire's religious poems [4] show a good many of the varied schemes which we have examined in connection with the drama; and the unknown translator of *Palladius on Husbandry* [5] puts his didactics into rhyme-royal, which naturally enough is not in the least poetic, but which is fairly correct as far as mere metre is concerned. But I think I may say that out of none of these is any new lesson whatever to be got, nor in them any new phenomena to be observed.

[1] E.E.T.S., ed. Aldis Wright. [2] E.E.T.S., as above.
[3] Ed. Horstmann (Heilbronn, 1883). [4] Percy Society, 1844.
[5] E.E.T.S., ed. Lodge. In the new edition of *Pol.*, *Rel. and Love Poems*, Dr. Furnivall has quite recently added a fresh dreadful example of 15th century disfigurement of rhyme-royal, in the shape of specimens from the *Amoryus and Cleopes* of John Metham, a Cambridge man, *c.* 1450. He evidently *meant* decasyllabics; but his actual syllables meander cheerfully from 8 to 17 (counted).—I ought also to have noticed with *Judas* (p. 251) the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in MS. Harl. 4196, ed. by Dr. Horstmann in Herrig's *Archiv*, liii. (1874). (See also W. A. Craigie, *An English Miscellany*, Oxford, 1901.) Here is a striking ballad-six from it :—

I baptyst him ryght with my hand
In the water of flom Jordan;
The Haly Gast on him gan lend
In a dowfe lyknes than;
The voyce of the fader downe was send
And thus to speke bygan.

The MS. is dated *c.* 1450: the text may be much older.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROSODY OF THE SCOTTISH POETS

Character and relative importance—Correctness and its moral—Points for attention—Early octosyllabic couplet: Barbour—The *Saints' Lives*—Wyntoun—Blind Harry—James I.—Henryson—Dunbar—His successors not equal—Douglas—The *Æneid*—The original poems—The Eighth Prologue—Lyndsay—The Reformation satires—Minor poems generally—Alexander Scott—Old-fashioned beauty of his metres—Montgomerie—The *Cherry and Slae* metre—Others—Hume and Mure.

Character and relative importance.

IT may seem a paradox to say—while fully admitting that superiority, of fifteenth and very early sixteenth century poetry in North Britain, which has practically been allowed by all competent critics not disgusted or foiled by the dialect—that the Scots poets require less minute treatment, from the prosodic point of view, than their Southern contemporaries. It is, however, quite true to the fact, and the reasons can be stated as confidently as the fact itself. These reasons are mainly three. The first is the extreme *lateness* of Scots poetry and Scots literature generally. Setting aside the misty and mythical "Huchowne," and the still earlier *Sir Tristrem*, the controversies whereon do not concern us, while their prosody has been fully treated already under other heads, we have no Scots poetry before the fifteenth century except Barbour, whose date—at least the date of the existing text—has also been questioned by some, though to my thinking with no force. Secondly, during its short flourishing as a literary medium, and especially during the palmiest times of that flourishing, Scots as a language went through no such tribulations and variations as

Southern English, so that the poets had a sure and trustworthy implement in their hands.

Correctness and its moral.

But the third reason, and the most important, is that Scots poetry, though not in the least parasitic, is strictly pupillary. Of the four great Scottish poets of this period, James the First—the first in another sense, of accomplished Scottish verse-writers—has produced a piece which, though not slavishly or stupidly, is simply *calqué* upon Chaucer,[1] traced against this or that quarry of the great Chaucerian oriel. Henryson, who has perhaps the most intensely poetic touch of all, in his greatest poem avowedly continues *Troilus and Creseid*, and is as faithful in form as in matter, though he may infuse a temper of his own. Dunbar, the greatest of all on the ordinary mixed reckoning, ranges himself as pupil to the English Three as obediently as a direct subject of his mistress Margaret Tudor's father or brother could do. And even Douglas, the only one of the four in whom the Thistle rather bristles itself up against the Rose, is just as thorough a Chaucerian ; indeed, though better in form than Lydgate, he has some of Lydgate's faults. As for the point of alliteration which all these Northern poets inevitably affect, that is no more Scottish than English in essence. Take this discipleship, and the additional fact that literary Scots, though largely admitting the vernacular, was not, strictly speaking, the vernacular itself, and the consequences are obvious. Just as a thoroughly well-trained English schoolboy writes Latin verse with stricter "correctness" than even Ovid himself, and with very much stricter correctness than other Latins, so do these Scottish poets write the metres of "their Inglis" with much greater precision than their fellow-pupils in the South do. In fact, this long training, continued *mutatis mutandis* by the school of Drummond and those about him just after the Union of the Crowns, and by Allan Ramsay and those about and after him just after the Union of the Parlia-

[1] We need not handle at any length the Chaucerising of *dialect*, most noticeable, if not only noticeable, in the *Quair*. This can be separated from the *prosody*.

ments, brought about a general prosodic exactitude in the Scottish verse-writer, just as similar causes brought about an almost meticulous grammatical accuracy (certain ineradicable locutions excepted) in the Scottish writer of prose.

Points for attention.

Where, therefore, to resume and revert, there are few exceptions and a great attention to rule, no elaborate discussion of individual examples is necessary ; but some cannot be spared, and at least a general account of the forms preferred in use is indispensable. And the investigation of the subject acquires interest, not merely from the half-accidental fact of the superior poetic gifts of certain individuals, but from more general phenomena in three very important divisions. The first of these arises from the expression of the metres in a dialect of broader vowel-sounds, and a more varied and accentuated scale of tonal accompaniments. The second comes from the partiality of the Scots, in the first place to extremely "aureate" Latin and Romance terms, and in the second to eccentric and *baroque* vernacularisms. The third arises from the very interesting continuation of the process, more and more given up in England, of sometimes arranging alliterated lines in extremely complicated stanzas of rhyme, and sometimes employing them frankly by themselves. According to our usual custom, we shall endeavour to bring out these points by successive survey of the works of the different known poets, with some account of anonymous poetry—"folk-" and other.

Early octosyllabic couplet. Barbour.

As we should expect,[1] this prosodic accuracy is least shown in the early octosyllabic poetry of the *Bruce*, the *Saints' Lives*, sometimes attributed to the same author, and Wyntoun. Their very earliness would bring this about to some extent, but there is a stronger reason present in the fact that their Southern exemplars them-

[1] Reference to texts is throughout to those of the *Scottish Text Society*, where they exist ; if others are used they are specified. I do not think much apology is needed for carrying the survey on beyond the strict period of this Book. Scots poetry (I do not say Scots language) from Barbour to Montgomerie is almost homogeneous ; and there is too little of it in the later sixteenth century to make separate treatment necessary or desirable.

selves oscillated between two forms, the syllabic and the equivalenced, and were often not particularly true to either. Yet even here it exists. You may read pages on pages of Barbour without discovering a single departure from evenly arranged octosyllables, except the licence (to which Chaucer was finally putting his seal about the same time) of a trochaic-catalectic verse (or of beginning with a monosyllabic foot at choice), and an occasional trisyllabic foot which may be often, if not oftenest, elided or contracted out of existence. Barbour knows the trick of dividing the couplets perfectly well, though he has not advanced to that of dividing the line.

The *Saints' Lives.*

The differences of the *Saints' Lives* are small, and mostly of the meticulous character on which stress has been laid, in the desire to elaborate a Middle English "scholarship." The alleged assonances are not easy to discover (I have read a thousand lines on end before finding one), and when they do occur they are generally sounds very close together, "tane," "hame," "crave," "rath" (cf. the childish "mouf" for "mouth"), etc. I do not, indeed, think that the run of the verse of these *Lives* is so strikingly like Barbour's as to be an argument in favour of his authorship; but it is not sufficiently different to be an argument against it. The fact is that the unequivalenced, or very lightly equivalenced, octosyllable is always very much the same, except in the hands of a distinct poetic genius. I could well believe (speaking, of course, from the purely prosodic point of view) that the *Lives* were anterior to the *Bruce*, and a sort of "exercise in school" for it.[1]

[1] Examples :—

Bruce

The kyng toward the vod is gane,
Wery, for-swat and vill of vayn ;
Intill the wod soyn enterit he,
And held doun toward a valè,
Quhar throu the vod a vattir ran.
Thiddir in gret hy went he than,
And begouth to rest hym thair,
And said he mycht no forthirmair.
vii. 1-8.

The chief difference to be found in the rather voluminous but not unpleasant amble of Wyntoun's verse is that, though actually *more* monotonous in its ordinary run, it more often indulges in a little trisyllabic curvet, while even this is not very common. Sometimes, however, as in ii. 461,[1] it will fall down as low as six syllables. Wyntoun.

Of the third chief metrical chronicle or quasi-chronicle in Scots, Blind Harry's *Wallace*, there is not much to say prosodically, except that its heroics are punctiliously syllabic, and observe the French cæsura at the fourth place with an almost excessive resolution, but one which, like the syllabic regularity, helps to prove our general point.[2] Blind Harry.

It is, however, when we come to the more poetical poets that we find this orderliness of prosody most. If "rhyme-royal" really owes its name to the *King's Quair*, it is scarcely more than a just recompense. Professor Skeat is absolutely right in calling James's metre "beautifully musical," and in contrasting it from this point of James I.

Saints' Lives

Thane gret Zozimus, he criyand,
"Me abyd, thu godis servande!
Suppose at I mane synful be,
Abyde a lytel and spek with me,
I conjure the in godis name,
For quham this penans thou has tane,
And for the hope of the reward
That thu is to haf eftirwarde;
And sene that refusis nane,
Abyd and blyss me, or thu gane."

St. Mary of Egypt, 247-256.

[1] "All the land thar about." So Cotton MS., others expanding "thar" to "that were." The trisyllabic feet perhaps oftenest contain words easily slurred ("Sewyn hundyr wyntyr and fifteyn," iv. 1. 1), and are often mended (or spoilt) in some versions, as in iv. 7, 1028 or 1032, where we may choose between "that wonnyng thai mycht noucht be of were" and "off weire thai mycht nocht wonnyng be."

[2] Than Wallace socht quhar his wncle suld be;
In a dyrk cawe he was set dulfullè,
Quhar watter stud, and he in yrnyss strang.
Wallace full sone the brassis wp he dang;
Off that myrk holl brocht him with strenth and lyst,
Bot noyis he hard, off nothing ellis he wyst.
So blyth befor in warld he had nocht beyn,
As thair with sycht, quhen he had Wallace seyn.

ix. 1345-1352.

view with Lydgate's; and it does not at all matter whether he is right or not in attributing part of the smoothness to an arbitrary dropping or using of the final *e metri gratia*. Of the fact of this smoothness there can be no doubt; and for once its general prevalence authorises the so often dangerous editorial habit of attributing exceptions to the copyist of the single MS. A "royal road to learning," or art of any kind, is generally taken to mean one which is rather quick and easy than thoroughly and artistically laid out and graduated. But James has shown how the thorough scholar, royal or not, passes, by the grace of nature, no doubt, as well as of scholarship and royalty, into the accomplished artist. Except *The Flower and the Leaf* there is nothing so beautiful of Chaucerian kind; and there does not seem to be the slightest possibility (as some of us still think there is in the other case) of the *King's Quair* being Chaucer's own in any way. The poet fails nowhere. He mainly observes the tetremimeral cæsura, which is really important in rhyme-royal, very carefully, but he does not make it in the least monotonous.[1] His individual lines are always adequate and sonorous in themselves; and yet they pass into each other with the varied jointing which is the triumph of this kind of composition, and which hardly anybody has ever reached unless he was either a great poet, or the scholar of one. If he avoids trisyllabic feet, it is, as we have seen and shall see, better, in this stanza, to do so; and he varies his dissyllabic feet abundantly.

Further, his diction, with the sound-values that it contributes to the symphonic effect of foot, line, line-group, and stanza, is selected with an admirable ear. He is not by any means disinclined to the "aureate" vocabulary

[1] In fact, curiously enough, the poem opens with four penthemimers :—

Heigh in the hevynnis | figure circulere
The rody sterres | twynklyng as the fyre :
And in Aquary | Cynthia the clere
Rynsid hir tressis | like the goldin wyre.

I have coined "tetremimeral" on the analogy of τετρήμερος rather than τεταρτήμερος. The Greeks had no use for the actual word; but you may have four halves as well as five or seven, I suppose.

which, while far from absent in Chaucer himself, was coming like a spring tide on the generations succeeding him; but he never loses his footing in it, as the French *rhétoriqueurs* and their followers in English, but especially in Scots, were to do. The poem, of course, prosodically as otherwise, is "school" poetry; but it is school-poetry of the very best kind.

Henryson.

James, however, had neither here nor elsewhere opportunity for showing himself an adept in varied kinds of verse. The case is different with the poems of that very remarkable poet, Henryson.[1] His work has never yet received the careful editing by which Professor Skeat has put the text of the *King's Quair* once for all in satisfactory condition, but its testimony to his prosodic accuracy is all the more forcible. Both in the rhyme-royal and in the nine-line stanzas of his capital poem, the *Testament of Cressid*, he follows Chaucer with a really wonderful sureness and mastery of form, and that form enables him, to a very large extent, to give the astonishing variety of colour and tone which exists there, though it has been too little recognised. Not Chaucer himself, not Sackville, has brought out the echoing clangour and melancholy majesty of the metre better than is done in the great tragic passages of this piece. And not even Chaucer has done much better, while Sackville has not attempted, its adaptation to the middle style of poetry in the opening of the poem, as well as in the *Fables*. With the octave of eights (as in the *Abbey Walk*) and in that of tens (as in *Youth and Age*) he has shown himself equally conversant.

The double common measure of his other greatest and by far his best-known piece, *Robene and Makyne*, is intentionally more irregular, though only with strictly regular irregularities.[2] He appears to me, though I

[1] Ed. Laing (Edinburgh, 1865). We are hoping for an S.T.S. edition from Professor Gregory Smith.

[2] The trisyllables are not very numerous, but they come in the right places.

The weddir is fair and I am fane,

of Makyne's appeal, with its echo in the lubberly lover's too late repentance—

The weddir is warm and fair,

believe not to others, to have come rather nearer to sing-song in the single quatrain of the same which serves for the *Garmond of Good Ladies*, but there are beautiful lines here. The riding-rhyme of *Orpheus and Eurydice*[1] is more than competent; and a much warmer word must be used of the ten-line stanza in which the central part (the bulk is rhyme-royal) of the same poem is written. These elaborate line-combinations are by no means easy to wield; it is the great and still too little recognised glory of Spenser that he is so utterly master of his. But Henryson, though of course on a smaller scale and with a less intrinsically beautiful stanza, is not far behind him. The modulation in the central complaint of Orpheus, with its refrain not slavishly kept—

Quhar art thow gane, my luf Erudices

(which has almost the very music, with pauses supplied, of *Che farò*), is quite an extraordinary thing for a poet in the very dawn of his special dialect-division of literature. And, taking him with James on the one hand, and against Lydgate and Occleve on the other, we have one of the most singular juxtapositions, in all letters, from our special point of view.

---

and Robene's earlier careless—

Peraventure my sheep ma gang besyd,

and the strict limitation of Makyne's rejection-stanzas, with just the one spurt—

And *never* again thairto perfay,

are equally well judged.

[1] That is to say of its *Moralitas*. There is *enjambement* as well as couplet separation here :—

Allace! in erd quhare is thare mare foly
Than for to want and have haboundantly,
To have distresse on bak, and bed, and burde,
And spare till othir men of gold a hurde,
And in the nycht slepe soundly may thai noucht,
To gadder geir sa gredy is thair thoucht.
Bot quhen that reson and intelligence
Playis upon the herp of conscience,
Schawand to ws quhat perrell on ilk syd
That thai incur quhay will trest or confyd,
Into this warldis vane prosperitie.

Dunbar.

I do not know that Dunbar owes quite so much of his special poetic virtue to his prosody as do the questioned king and the questionable schoolmaster before him; and I shall allow anybody who pleases to say that this is because he is a greater poet. But he does not in the very least give the lie to our contention, or provide an exception to our rule. He is more various even than Henryson in forms, and acquits himself handsomely with all of them from the mere prosodic point of view, while he has for us one point of especial interest, which neither Henryson nor James offers, in that he is, prosodically speaking, Chaucer *plus* Langland, *plus* a very considerable proficient in the lyric forms that Chaucer seldom tried.[1] He, being "a *Northern* man," can *rym*, *ram*, *ruff* with the best of them, as well as turn out something very different from "rhyme doggerel" in "royal" and octaves, in other combinations (especially the five-line

[1] We can hardly "spare to interpose" some examples of so great a metrist and rhythm-master. The stately if rather artificial octaves of the *Golden Targe*; the accomplished if, like the octaves, rather over-"aureated" rhyme-royal of *The Thrissill and the Rois*, and the dæmonic Romance-sixes and twelves of the *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, are in all the extract books. Therefore should be preferred here the wonderful præ-Raphaelite picture, referred to below, that heads *The Twa Maryit Wemen*:—

I saw thre gay ladeis sit in ane grein arbeir,
All grathit into garlandis of fresche gudelie flouris;
So glitterit as the gold wer thair glorius gilt tressis,
Quhill all the gressis did gleme of the glaid hewis;
Kemmit was thair cleir hair, and curiouslie sched
Attour thair schulderis doun schyre, schyning full bricht;
With curches cassin thame abone, of kirsp cleir and thin:
Thair mantillis grein war as the gress that grew in May sessoun,
Fetrit with thair quhyt fingaris about thair fair sydis:
Off ferliful fyne favour war thair faceis meik,
All full of flurist fairheid, as flouris in June;
Quhyt, seimlie, and soft, as the sweit lillies;
New upspred upon spray as new spynist rose,
Arrayit ryallie about with mony rich wardour,
That Nature, full nobillie, annamalit fine with flouris
Off al kin hewis under hewin, that ony heynd knew;
Fragrant, all full of fresche odour, fynest of smell.
Ane marbre tabile coverit wes befoir thai thre ladeis,
With ryale cowpis upon rawys full of riche wynis.

In many of Dunbar's lyrics the admixture of Latin lines which has been noticed above in regard to the English lyric of his period generally, produces an admirable effect, especially in the famous *Lament for the Makers* or "Timor Mortis conturbat me." Another example, much less known, is "Rorate Coeli desuper," which shows, what I think may be observed in these mixtures

stanza of eights), in common measure, Romance sixes and twelves, and what not, as well as (if he wrote the *Fryars of Berwick*) in capital heroic couplet. And his unrhymed, unstanzaed, alliterative lines in *The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo* are by far the best that we have out of *Piers Plowman* itself, and perhaps *Cleanness*. They comply, indeed, a little with that rather ungoverned desire for excessive alliteration which we observe in the later practitioners of the style, especially in Scots; but they do not yield to this in the extravagant fashion of Gavin Douglas. And it may almost be said that Dunbar *never* here (whatever he may do in his "flyting" moods) permits himself to caricature the method. While for vigour and variety, for colour and tone, and especially for keeping up the curious irregular accompaniment,[1] like the humming of a bee, which this metre admits and recom-

generally, the *corroborating* effect, as of an interwoven thread of silver wire, which the Latin exercises :—

Rorate coeli desuper!
Hevins, distill your balmy schouris,
For now is rissin the bricht day ster
Fro the roiss Mary, flour of flouris.
The cleir Sone quhome no clud devouris,
Surmunting Phebus in the est,
Is cumin of his hevinly touris.
Et nobis Puer natus est!

For the pure vernacular we might take the half-merry, half-sad swing of—

Come nevir yet May so fresche and grene,
Bot Januar come als wud and kene—
Wes nevir sic drowth bot anis come rane,
All erdly joy returnis in pane;

or the beautiful companion piece (much Chaucer-inspired in matter and phrase, if not in prosody) of "Quilk to consider is ane pane," or the quintains of the "Changes of Lyfe"—

Yisterday fair sprang the flouris,
This day thai ar all slane with schouris;
And foulis in forrest that sang cleir
Now walkis with ane drerie cheir,
Full cauld are all thair beddis and bouris.

But Dunbar, like all the greater poets to whom we are coming, is a beguiler. He who quotes, or begins quoting, is lost.

[1] All to be found specially in the overture of *The Twa Maryit Wemen*, with its exquisite scene and figures, contrasting so audaciously with the unrelieved ugliness that follows. The conclusion "frames" and sets off the piece as artistically.

mends, he has hardly an equal, save again Langland, who as a rule, and from his argumentative subjects, allows himself less of it.

His successors not equal.

It would, however, be very surprising, if not quite inconceivable, that the influences which told upon the main body of the English language should not have had some effect upon its outlier, despite the special preservatives which we have noticed. It would be all the more surprising to us inasmuch as Lydgate, with whom the rot had already set in,[1] was, as we have seen, admitted by Scots, as well as by southern Englishmen, to something like full equality with Chaucer himself. And we certainly do find traces of it, though not to the same extent as in Hawes and Skelton, in their contemporaries Douglas and Lyndsay. This is the more remarkable in Douglas,[2] because it might have been thought that his scholarship in the ancient tongues would have kept him straight, where, with little or none of such scholarship, King James, Henryson, and Dunbar had found no temptations to go crooked. But this preservative does not seem to have been exerted.

Douglas.

Not that the good Bishop (who was so furiously angry with Caxton for not doing what he never pretended to do with Virgil, and with wicked critics for not doing himself and other good people justice) is a very great offender; in fact, as a rule his prosody is a very fairly competent vehicle for his frequently poetical and almost always vigorous and individual diction. It is not here that any objections would be made to his inserting in the heroics of the text of his great translation such Alexandrines as—

The *Æneid*.

> And Troiane armour and ensenzies (*ensigns*) with me saw,

or—

> Intill his hiddius hand thaim thrimbillit and wrang,

if he intended them as such. But the intention is not quite so clear: and it is certain that in other places he

[1] Let not any rash person take this for modern slang. *A Rot among the Bishops* is the title of a seventeenth-century pamphlet.

[2] Ed. Small (4 vols., Edinburgh, 1874).

has indulged in things not merely ugly but to a certain extent incompetent. The hideous Lydgatian break-back is not absent in him. He has ugly twistings or neglects of accent such as—

> Quhas passage is unreturnable went,

and is liable, like nearly all the poets, Northern and Southern, of the period, to an extreme infirmity of mind whether words ending in "able," etc., are to be rhymed on the suffix, or the antepenultimate, or both together. These defects do not prevent the main body of the translation from possessing the merits above attributed, but they slightly interfere with those merits, and they certainly do not present us, in Douglas, with the agreeable spectacle of prosody serving as more than helpmeet to poetry.

The original poems.

Not very different, though more various, are the results of examination into the nine- and ten-line stanzas of the *Palice of Honour*, the octaves of *King Hart*, and the varied metres of the *Æneid* Prologues. Douglas does not, in the first two, break down so often or so badly as Hawes, but he breaks down in something the same way, particularly in the name-catalogues, which he rather affects. It is the same with the rhyme-royal, which, with other forms, appears in the Prologues.[1] The seventh of these, in heroics or riding rhyme, is one of his very best exercises in that metre. But the chief prosodic interest in this division rests with the Eighth, where he exhibits, almost for the last time in the case of a poet of real gifts, the combination of extravagant alliteration with elaborate rhymed stanza.

The Eighth Prologue.

If it were not for its vigour, which is considerable, and perhaps for its historical interest, which is not small, this would be a rather awful example. It is the old thirteen-line stanza, of nine mainly rhythmical long lines and four short metrical ones, rhymed *abababababcddc*. As the

[1] For instance—

> Galien, Averroes, and Plato.
> *P. of H.* ed. cit. i. 12.
> I understude be signes persavabill
> That was Cupyd, the god maist dessavabill.
> *Ibid.* i. 20.

opening stanza given below[1] will show, alliteration is pushed to the over-dose of five syllables in a single line, throughout a large proportion of the long lines, with seldom less than four in the remainder. In other stanzas there are even examples of six.[2] Here the two old objections come in, each of them ten thousand strong. It is impossible that, on such a system, the alliterating word should not be preferred to the appropriate; and it is at least very probable that in the dearth of appropriate words, words grossly inappropriate will be dragged in, and if necessary invented. This piece is in fact, I believe, with the "flytings," the main source, in Scots poetry, of words which either never existed at all in ordinary use, or would have been recognised by every one at the time as *inusitata*. Once more, to put yourself into such a servitude as this is to "lose all the grace and liberty of the composition."

Lyndsay.

Of this comparative prosodical inaccuracy (for comparative it is in both senses and directions—more as regards the earlier important Scottish poets, and less as regards contemporary English), Sir David Lyndsay[3] shows some, but rather less trace. In the varied stanzas of his shorter poems, in the octosyllables in which he, unlike Douglas, takes delight, and which supply the staple of the rather amusing *Squire Meldrum* and the very unamusing *Dialogue between Experience and a Courtier*,

[1] Of dreflyng and dremis quhat dow is it to endyt?
For as I lenyt in a ley in Lent this last nycht,
I slaid on a swevynnyng slummerand a lite:
And sone a selcouth sege I saw to my sycht,
Swownand as he suelt wald, soupit in site—
Was nevir wrocht in this warld mayr wofull a wycht,
Ramand: Ressoun and rycht is rent by falss rite,
Frendschip flemyt is in France, and fayth hes the flycht,
Leis, lurdanry, and lust ar our laid-stern;
Pece is put out of play,
Welth and weilfair away,
Lufe and lawte bayth tuay,
Lurkis full dern.
iii. 142.

[2] Bailfull byssynes bayth blys and brightnes can bost.
Ibid.

[3] Ed. Laing and Small (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1879).

and in the quaintly blended *pot-pourri* of the *Satire of the Three Estates*, he sometimes breaks down, but seldom; and on the whole he is far more of a general example of our main proposition than of an exception to it.[1]

The Reformation satires.

It is curious how this scholastic exactness shows itself even in the places where we should look for it last, and least—the rough-and-tumble verse diatribes, which were nowhere more rough-and-tumble than in the Scotland of the Reformation.[2] Of course there are slovenly pieces here; and the survival of pure alliterative poetry helps, but does not excuse, their roughness. Yet it is strange how comparatively polished is the octosyllabic verse of even such a vitriolic lampoon as Sempill's on Patrick Adamson: one can almost imagine sometimes, except that the humour is baser and less "metaphysical," that one is reading genuine Hudibrastics. Many of the pieces attributed to Sempill or the Wedderburns apply sometimes rather complicated metres right deftly. But *the* poems of this division of Scots verse are the famous "Sing hey, trix! trim go trix!" (which Scott's discreet quotation in *The Abbot* has made known to everybody, and which the prudery of a most respectable editor has somewhat ludicrously mutilated in the Scottish Text Society edition), and the "Ballad on St. Bartholomew," where the anapæstic rhythm and the occasional double internal rhyme are not unworthy of Thomas Ingoldsby.[3] There is hardly such a

[1] Lyndsay, however, is an example of a pretty obvious fact which will meet us at every turn hereafter, that the greater the acquired prosodic regularity the more naked is the natural prosaic bathos. For instance—

> For lyte make peace I nevere wald consent
> Except the kyng of France had been content.

Excellent politics, but woful poetry! It is not necessary to dwell on this fact or on the explanation of it. The best prosody best sets off the best poetry; the worst poetry, in good prosody, lacks the excuse that bad might give it.

[2] See Cranstoun's *Satirical Poems of the Reformation*, and Mitchell's *Gude and Godlie Ballates* in the S.T.S. reprints. Allan Ramsay gave a good many of them in *The Evergreen*.

[3] Suppois that the Papistes devuysit this at Trent
To ding us and bring us with mony lowd lauchter,
With sic cruel murther is Christ sa content
To take thee and make thee ane sanct for our slauchter?
Albeit he correct us and scourge us in ire,
Be war with the wand syne he wapis in the fyre.

hand-gallop of verse till we come to the famous songs of the end of the seventeenth century. In fact these two pieces deserve to rank with "Back and side, go bare, go bare," as the trinity of thoroughly successful accomplishments in rapid measure during the sixteenth itself.

Minor poems generally.

The lesson is maintained in the minor poets, named and unnamed, wherever they are not deliberately indulging in alliterative looseness, and sometimes when they are. The sheer jargon and *coq-à-l'âne* style of the "flytings" is by no means deficient in modulation; nor is even such utter ribaldry as Clerk's "Brash of Wowyng." The two best sentimental pieces, "Tayis Bank" and the "Mourning Maiden,"[1] owe much of their charm to the sweetness of their metre; and all the romance-ballads, or ballad-romances, to the well-marked time of theirs. Undoubtedly, in all this poetry there is a great deal of *cliché*—of stock stuff which can be, and has been, made up and remade, till it has brought Scots verse into some disrepute. But this is itself partly due to the way in which the original shapers and wielders of the metrical die stamped the coin into currency and memory.

Alexander Scott.

The poets in Scots of the end of the sixteenth

[1] These, with much else, will be most conveniently found in Mr. Hazlitt's rearrangement of Laing's *Early Scottish Popular Poetry* (2 vols., London, 1895). But a stanza from each may be given:—

Quhen Tayis bank wes blumyt brycht,
With blosomes blyth and bred,
Be that river that ran doun rycht,
Undir the ryss I red;
The merle melit with all hir mycht
And mirth in mornyng maid,
Throw solace, sound, and semely sicht
Alswth a sang I said.

The "Maiden" has a rather more complicated metre:—

Still undir the levis grene,
This hindir day, I went alone;
I hard ane may sair mwrne and meyne,
To the King of Luif sche maid hir mone.
Sche sychit sely soir:
Said "Lord! I luif thi lore;
Mair wo dreit nevir woman one!
O langsum lyfe, and thow war gone
Than suld I mwrne no moir!"

century have considerable interest from our point of view, especially the two most remarkable of them—Alexander Scott, who is indeed rather of the later middle than of the end, and Montgomerie, who is of the early seventeenth as well as of the late sixteenth. The general prosodic correctness of the section is shown by the excellent but exceedingly dull Rolland in the *Court of Venus* and the *Seven Sages*; but of him we need hardly speak. Of the two others, Scott was probably the intenser, if not the greater poet, and he exhibits, more than does Montgomerie, the power of absolutely suiting the sound to the sense in the best prosodic way. But he resembles him (though the point of resemblance is not quite so surprising in him the elder, as it is in Montgomerie the younger) in the strangely antique, and actually mediæval, character of their verse. Little as we know of Scott, we do practically know that he must have written up to the time when Spenser was making his first appearance; and there is every reason to believe that Montgomerie did not die till Spenser had been dead some years. Yet when we compare them now with the first great Elizabethan generation, they seem positively mediæval in form. The exaggerated alliteration of Scott's address to Queen Mary, though it made its appearance after *Tottel's Miscellany* was printed, and many years after Wyatt and Surrey had actually written, may owe something to Douglas in particular. But *all* Scott's forms, though now and then exquisitely musical, have the half-wild, half-artificial music of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The bobbed form of the tournament between Adamson and Sym is, of course, mere reminiscence of things like *Christ's Kirk*;[1] but this very reminiscence is an important point in Scots prosody. The octaves of the "Remeid of Luve" are not conspicuously archaic. But in most of his lyrics, as fine at times as they are coarse at others, the poet affects much more conceited,

Old-fashioned beauty of his metres.

[1] This well-known piece, with its companion *Peebles to the Play*, illustrates at once the uncertainty of the *time*, and the complex correctness of *form*, in these examples.

and antiquely conceited, things. The octave sixes of that very particularly scandalous piece which has for refrain—

I sall not sait again ;

the quintets of many (including the saddest and sweetest of Scott's poems, "To Luve Unluvit"); the octaves of eights, though all right artfully done, are all "of the auld fasoun," quaint things suggesting citherns and citoles to sing them on. No *rhétoriqueur* in France throughout the fifteenth century but would have been "half in a rapture and half in a rage" at "Haif Hairt in Hairt," where the poet manages to weave three stanzas of rhyme-royal with the word "heart" from twice to four times in each line, and yet to make a symphony neither fulsome nor merely clattering. He has not only the regular Burns metre, but a shortened form, with single-foot thirds and fifths refrained on the same words, "resoun," "tresoun"; and another very pretty [1] stave, also shortened from a longer,

[1] Quha is perfyte
To put in wryt
The inwart murning and mischance,
Or to indyte
The grit delyte
Of lustie lufis obschervaunce,
Bot he that may certane,
Patiently suffer pain,
To win his soverane
In recompance.

Here are examples of other forms referred to in the text :—

It cumis yow luvaris to be laill,
Of body, hairt and mynd alhaill.
And though ye with year ladyis daill—
Ressoun ;
Bot and your faith and lawty faill—
Tressoun !

Ed. cit. p. 36.

Haif hairt in hairt, ye hairt of hairtis haill ;
Trewly sweit hairt, your hairt my hairt sal haif ;
Expell, deir hairt, my havy hairtis baill,
Praying yow, hairt quhilk hes my hairt in graif,
Sen ye, sweit hairt, my hairt may sla and saif,
Lat not, deir hairt, my leill hairt, be forloir,
Excelland hairt of every hairtis gloir.

Ed. cit. p. 30.

The "bobbed" one is so well known from Burns that it need not be quoted,

arranged 4484486664, rhymed *aabaabcccb*. In all these poems Scott has the *carillon* effect which is so charming, but which also gives an effect of *curiosity*, of something out of its own time and place.

Montgomerie. There is less of this in Montgomerie, but he has the compensating importance of *bulk*—of being a person of known influence and position, and of being practically the last important poet, not merely of the independent kingdom of Scotland, but of the unadulterated Scots tongue. Between Montgomerie and his reviver, Allan Ramsay, not a single versifier in pure Scots is of the slightest rank in the history of English literature; and those Scotsmen who do write verse of merit — Drummond, Stirling, Aytoun, Montrose—write it either wholly in southern English, or when they are serious.[1] On the other hand, Montgomerie has more than this rather forlorn position of *ultimus Scotorum* in the particular department. He retains the ear of the Scottish public, though he does not impress followers. The seventeenth century was not exactly the time when Scotland gave most ear to "profane" (at least, not sacred), as well as "vain and amatorious" literature. But, including the vanished edition of Andro Hart in 1615, *The Cherry and the Slae* was printed no less than eight times between its first appearance on the eve of the seventeenth century (in 1597) and the beginning of the eighteenth, while in this latter it had as many by itself, besides reappearances

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but this delightful minikin stanza (the kind of thing that Guest hated) may be :—

Be land or se,
Quhaur evir I be,
As ye fynd me,
So tak me ;
An gif I le,
And from yow fle,
Ay quhill I de
Forsaik me !

Ed. cit. p. 39.

For the relations of this with metres apparently different, see Appendix.

[1] There is a third class, probably small and little studied, but of whom Patrick Hannay (see the present writer's *Minor Caroline Poets*, Oxford, 1905, vol. i.) is a fairly copious example, who write literary English, with odd occasional droppings into Scots. But they have few or no *prosodic* peculiarities.

in Watson's *Collection*, and in the frequently reprinted *Evergreen* of Allan Ramsay.

These apparently statistical and bibliographical facts are of really critical and historical weight in reference to, and in connection with, that archaism which has been glanced at. While English poetry was becoming more and more "modern"—while the very Elizabethans themselves were getting to seem antiquated, and everything was settling down to the couplet or blank verse for maids-of-all-work, and a few very simple lyric forms for occasional assistants,—the most popular, and still most recent, Scots poem of importance might, as regards its metre, and almost as regards its diction, have stepped out of a mystery-play of the late fourteenth century.

The *Cherry and Slae* metre.

The metre[1] of *The Cherry and the Slae* is a quatorzain (the word[2] appears to have been actually used in the mysterious edition of Hart) made up of a Romance six, a common-measure quatrain (a mixture so far not unfamiliar), and another "wheel" quatrain, of which more immediately. In continuous denumeration of line and rhyme it runs 886886866666, *aabccbdedefghg*. In the cadence and rhyme of the first ten lines there is nothing peculiar; but in the wheel-quatrain there is. The first and third lines, which, as will be seen by the scheme-specimen, do not rhyme together or with any other lines, rhyme internally; and this rhyme, being double, gives them a very unusual cadence. This is

[1] About ane bank quhair birdis on bewis
Ten thousand tymis thair notis renewis
Ilke houre into the day,
The merle and maueis micht be sene,
The Progne and the Phelomene,
Quhilk caussit me to stay.
I lay and leynit me to ane bus
To heir the birdis beir;
Thair mirth was sa melodius
Throw nature of the yeir;
Sum singing, some springing
With wingis into the sky,
So trimlie, and nimlie,
Thir birdis they flew me by.

[2] In the form "quator*ziem*."

perhaps the chief thing in English deserving the name of amphibrachic if the lines be taken as wholes: but it very much tempts one to split them, and to arrange four of them as a sixain [1] of very short lines (part monometer catalectic) on a par with those of Scott noticed above. In skeleton, and perhaps even in a single example, the whole looks excessively complicated and cumbrous, a sort of stiff brocaded and whaleboned farthingale for the lithe and graceful body of the Muse. In practice, however, and when the eye and ear are broken to it, it is considerably better, and there is no doubt that it attuned itself very satisfactorily to Scottish taste. Its success is very mainly due to its extreme precision, without which so complicated a thing would become a mere tangle of jars and discords, but which actually keeps it in harmony.

Others.

There is really as much, though the coarse gibberish to which it is yoked probably makes it difficult for its few modern readers to perceive, in the variegated metres and rhythms of the "Flyting with Polwarth"—Montgomerie's most popular and often-printed piece, next to the *Cherry*, and the latest important example of this childish and uncomely fashion of writing. Nor is it less in the minor poems, which present a large selection of forms. Most of these, however—in fact, nearly all—we have already discussed under the head of other poets or (for he repeats *The Cherry and the Slae* stanza in them) under his own. But he deserves more special mention as the first, principal, and last sonneteer, in Scots proper, who uses it as a natural literary tongue, and not as a revived literary curiosity. The perusal of these sonnets will indeed perhaps partly explain why his younger contemporaries, Drummond and Alexander, used English for the form: but they are rather the more, not the less, interesting for this. Some at least were written late, none perhaps

[1] For example:—

Some singing,
Some springing,
With wings into the sky,
So trimly,
And nimbly,
Those birds they flew me by.

very early ; but we know that Montgomerie had at least attempted the form by 1584, when his master published the *Rewlis and Cautelis.* At this time the great English sonnet-outburst had hardly begun, though Sidney, Watson, and perhaps others had already taken up the adventure which Wyatt and Surrey had started forty years before. And it is therefore probable that Montgomerie had only foreign (and most likely French) models before him, though he may have directly studied the Italians. But it is noticeable that, with only three exceptions out of seventy, he uses the English form with final couplet, if also with intertwined rhyme, and, though he often makes a distinct break in sense or evolution between octave and sestet, he does not always. As compared, however, with his only certain English forerunners, he has entirely got rid of uncertainty of cadence and irregularity of line. In fact, the chief objection that can be brought against his sonnets is that the lines are too regular, and too constantly end-stopped, to admit of the variety, the flexibility, the rise and fall of note, which so greatly increases, if it does not mainly constitute, the beauty of the form.[1]

[1] Here is an example fairly representative, neither more nor less staccato in movement than most (lvi.):—

Excuse me, Plato, if I suld suppone
That underneth the hevinly vauted round,
Without the world [=wuruld], or in pairts profound
By Stix inclosd, that emptie place is none.
If watrie vauts of air be full echone,
Then what contenis my teirs which so abound
With sighis and sobbis, which to the hevins I sound,
When Love delytis to let me mak my mon?
Suppose the solids subtilis ay restrantis,
Which is the maist, my maister, ye may mene ;
Thought all war void, yit culd they not contene
The half let be the haill of my complaintis.
Vhair go they then? the question wald I c[rave]
Except for ruth the hevins suld thame [ressave].

But Montgomerie could be as lively as he liked, witness the admirable Matin Song :—

Hay ! now the day dawis ;
The jolie cok crauis ;
Nou shroudis the schauis,
Threu Nature anone.
The thisell-cok cryis
On louers vha lyis.
Nou skaillis the skyis :
The nicht is neir gone !

Hume and Mure.

Little need be said of Montgomerie's contemporary Alexander Hume, or of his younger relative Sir William Mure of Rowallan; but their work, inferior as it is, practically quite confirms the general conclusion we are drawing. No grave sins against mere prosody are chargeable on Hume, one of the dullest dogs in Scottish poetry. One would almost be grateful for a few break-downs as a relief from the intolerable monotony of measured prose. Whether he writes in fourteeners at length, or breaks them up into common measure; whether he arranges his decasyllables in couplets or stanzas; he is technically faultless, as he is technically and in all other ways dull. The much more abundant and prosodically much more varied verses of Rowallan, Montgomerie's sister's son, do not deserve quite such harsh language poetically, though they are no great things. But they deserve the same testimonial prosodically, without the ungracious qualification. He conducts experiments rather widely, even attempting the anapæstic metres which are not common so early in the century: and he is never exactly ill at the mere numbers, especially in the early poems which (long unknown) have been printed in the S.T.S. edition. The sixains of his *Dido and Æneas* and the couplets of his later pieces, as well as the (almost obligatory) common measure of his *Psalms*, call for no special notice either way. But he has also the rather quaintly conceived stanza of the *Conflict*,[1] the Poulter's measure imitated from the early Elizabethans (of whom Mure was evidently a diligent student), and several more unusual forms, culminating in a really pretty and bell-like piece, "Must I unpittied still remain"[2]; as well as the rattling anapæsts of—

> Glaidstones is gone, his corps doth heir dwell,
> But where be his other halfe no man can tell.

[1] 8866661010 rhymed *aabccbdd*.

[2] Must I unpittied still remain
But regaird,
Or rewaird,
Nothing caird,
But by my sweetest slain?

These are not contemptible, while his sonnets run rather better than his uncle's, whatever may be their inferiority in other ways.

It does not seem in any way necessary to go beyond these, or to return to others that have been passed over. The creative efforts in verse of the second (perhaps the third [1]) poetical James had better wait for such notice as they require till we come to his critical remarks on it. Elsewhere, look where we may in the miscellaneous poems earlier or later, already more than once or twice glanced at, and continued down to, and beyond, Ker of Ancram—in the rather wooden decasyllabic couplets of *Clariodus*,[2] in the octosyllables of the *Buik of Alexander the Great*,[3] and its smaller romance companions [4]—everywhere and always we shall find the same larger allowance of strict correctness, with the same tendency to abide by old ways, and to write in forms a good deal behind the times.

[1] For James the *Fifth* has some claims to be a poet.

[2] Maitland Club, Edinburgh, 1830.

[3] Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1831. Occasionally these "peter out" into decasyllables, but only by accident.

[4] *Sir Graysteil*, *Roswal and Lillian*, etc., in Laing, or Hazlitt.

INTERCHAPTER III

In all histories there are points or passages of the extremest real importance, on which, for this reason or for that, it is difficult to fix the attention of non-experts, while even experts are sometimes apt not quite fully to perceive the real nature of the importance itself. Such a point we have, in the opinion of the present writer, reached in our own case. On certain general facts about the literature of the fifteenth century, with that first quarter of the sixteenth which is by pretty common consent to be subsumed in it for Southern England, with an even larger extension for Scotland, there is not much dispute; but there is a great deal on particular details. Here, as always and everywhere, the aim of the present book is rather to lay down what seems to the author a correct and catholic view of the facts, based upon and supported by those facts themselves, than to "fight prizes" after the fashion of thesis-writers. And it is only where it is absolutely necessary that he cares to exchange the trowel for the sword. Argument, indeed, is of very little use in these matters. To those who will not examine the actual facts it is always useless and may be misleading; it ought to be superfluous to anybody who will examine them, though it may occasionally spare him a little trouble in way of guidance.

The facts themselves may be best marshalled or manœuvred in several different faces and formations. On the one hand we have that—at first sight seeming likely to produce only one result—of a genius of the highest, or all but the highest rank having just appeared, who has mustered and co-ordinated the literary resources of the

whole country, North as well as South, into a finished literary, or at least poetical, form, and has achieved the most admirable results from and in it. Further, the Chaucerian authority, and the Chaucerian accomplishment, meet with no challenge or rebellion from anybody. Even the political antagonism, never bitterer than at this time, between North and South Britain in their separate political conditions, has not the very slightest effect upon the general chorus of admiring discipleship. This is avowed as heartily by the monk (he must have been a very odd monk) perhaps of Berwick as by the monk certainly of Bury, by the brother of the Douglas who fell at Flodden as well as by that forerunner of Mr. Anthony Trollope's ne'er-do-weel Civil-Service clerk, who feasted and flirted at the Paul's Head by Doctors' Commons. The Renaissance idolatry of Virgil, the eighteenth-century respect of France for Racine and of England for Pope, were contested faiths, ill-established orthodoxies, in comparison with the fifteenth-century admiration of Chaucer by all who wrote "English" in any of its forms.

Let it be remembered, too, that at no point had Chaucer's achievement been greater than in the department of prosody. He had indeed invented nothing, not even a special arrangement of metre. But he had performed, in regard to this also, his special function of strengthening, regularising, inspiriting, and polishing at once, to the very greatest possible extent. He had not, in his more original work, practised the old octosyllable much; but he had shown how it could be at once kept in order and given due liberty—how it could free itself from the tags and *chevilles* which had beset it. He had caught up the decasyllabic couplet—a mere "sport" or accident in previous English verse—and had established it, probably for all time, as one of the great staples, if not *the* great staple, of English poetry, with all fair licence of variety and extension, and with abundant examples both of its self-contained and its overlapped divisions. In rhyme-royal he had given an admirable and, in a way, finally perfected stanza-form, with others only a little

inferior. But immense as was his achievement—Lycurgus of the laws of English poetry as he showed himself even thus far—he had done almost more by selecting and, as it were, creating a poetic diction suitable for the forms which he practised and taught. Perfectly easy, and so perfectly capable of dignity or passion; supporting and supported by the prosodic framework which it filled; co-ordinating the ragged, uncouth, unkempt dialects of his predecessors into a real standard English of poetry—this phraseology of his secured at once, kept till the circumstances to be dealt with presently antiquated it, and (after a century or so of ignorant undervaluation) has fully recovered, the admiration of every competent judge, and the affection of every real lover of poetry.

Therefore, if in a prosodic Congress of the Nations holden in the year 1400, the English delegate had said, *Quis me uno felicior est?* the self-conceit with which our country has so often been reproached would really have had some excuse.

But it would have been punished as usual, and more than as usual. As we have seen, not one single known poet of real poetical value took up the work of Chaucer, for a hundred years and more, among Chaucer's own immediate countrymen. But this was nothing. You cannot bottle up the winds of the spirit in bags for use when they are wanted, nor is there any law of entail in the land of poesy. But, and this is surprising, what is, to some extent at least, the most learnable and mechanical of the constituents of poetry fared as badly as the most ethereal and elusive. Here is Lydgate—a man of vast industry, endowed with nearly all the older culture of his time, a man of wits and wit, educated at the most famous universities abroad as well as at home, nay, a man who has some faint flashes of actual poetry now and then, —and he cannot be trusted to write three decent lines running, and people have to invent a morbid growth of verse[1] in order to get some method into his muddle.

[1] "Lydgate's disease" we might feel inclined to call the broken-backed enneasyllable; but on the strict medical analogy of "Bright's," "Addison's," etc., we ought probably to prefer "Schick's disease."

Here is Occleve—rather a poor creature, but certainly not the inferior of scores and hundreds of very decent versifiers at other times—who is, on the whole, little better than Lydgate. Here is Hawes, who actually would be a poet if he could ever get the great ox off his tongue, and who cannot get it to budge more than an inch or so for his life. Here is Skelton, in many ways as bright a wit as Europe could show, a born man of letters, who is given up, if not quite exclusively, to bombast and doggerel by turns.

Nor, as I have endeavoured to show by kicking at a rather less open door, is the practice of the Scottish poets exactly what might have been expected and hoped. By accident they include men of a more really poetical habit and diathesis than the English division supplies; and, not quite by accident, they pursue the Chaucerian and anti-Chaucerian lessons in stanza, in pure or mixed alliteration, and in formal lyric, in a manner thoroughly satisfactory to the examiners. But — except in the popular forms, which are here not inferior in England— they give very few signs of promise and futurity. They invent no stanza like Spenser's; and correct, vigorous, effective, as their decasyllables are, they, in a manner surprising in users of Northern speech, and betraying the almost scholastic and meticulous accuracy of the school, give no such development of the possibilities of equivalence in this line as is given, hardly later than the time of the not quite latest of them, in England.

In fact, what has been called the belated mediævalism of the Scots gives us, in the language of Hebrew prophecy, a "sign," and a very valuable one, which we can turn back upon the lessons of the English division, and improve them withal, before coming even to a fuller and completer explanation of the paradox.

The exploit of Chaucer *was* a mighty one: in some senses there is nothing like it in all literature. But from causes over which Chaucer himself had absolutely no control, it was to a very great extent a final and what

may be called a retrospective exploit. It did consummately—with such thoroughness and artistic perfection that it could not be better done, or done again at all—what English poets had been awkwardly striving to do for two hundred years. It got the blending of Teutonic and Latin matter and machinery into shape as thoroughly as was then possible. It laid the foundations of all future building, though, to a certain extent, there was to be building *out*, as well as building *up*, from its structure.

But Chaucer could not possibly have foreseen, or even if he could have foreseen have reckoned with, the effects of a linguistic change, which, though it was evidently beginning in his own day, was not fully accomplished till a hundred and fifty years later, if quite then. What this change exactly was, what were its causes, how it proceeded, and what were its actual results, one would have thought it one of the first businesses of especially linguistic students to tell us; but I have never, in much searching, been able to discover any successful attempt on their part to do so, and I am not acquainted with very many or very strenuous attempts at all. They have indeed dealt copiously, if not always satisfactorily, with the greatest single instance or influence in this change,—the dropping of the valued final *e*, which by this time had become a mere archaic nuisance, representing the *débris* of twenty different forms, and possessing no longer any real grammatical value as a written thing, while it had clearly, even before 1400, begun to lose some of its value as a spoken one.

It needs no elaborate study, and not much thought, to see that even this single point—the lopping off of the final syllable from a very large proportion of the words in the English vocabulary—must have had immense and very bewildering effects on the sound-values of the language. The mere loss of the actual syllable was the least of these, though it was considerable in itself; and by tempting poets sometimes to value the *e* and sometimes not, it introduced a grievous confusion and uncertainty, and a dangerous

temptation to play tricks.[1] Nay, by suggesting the class of doublets ending in *-y*, "hugy," "paly," etc., it actually created terms of specially "poetic" diction, which have proved of doubtful benefit centuries after the circumstances of their origin and excuse have disappeared, and have sometimes, as in "goody," acquired special meanings of their own. But this, I say, was the least of the results. A word is a weight possessing extension, and sometimes very considerable extension, and if you lop off a certain part of it at one end, the equilibrium of the rest will be not a little affected.

Now the equilibrium of words, and the relations of their different centres of gravity to each other, constitute the most important conditions precedent of prosody. The poet of the fifteenth century in England was a gamester, who suddenly found the dice to which he was accustomed loaded in quite a new fashion; an acrobat or conjurer, who found the proportions, the weights, the balances of his instruments all changed upon his hands.

But this again was not all. Whether the vowel-pronunciation of English up to Chaucer's time was so different from ours as some scholars hold is a point on which I have the profoundest doubts. The complaints of the difficulty or impossibility of English pronunciation to foreigners are too early and too universal; and among the few facts which we have, as opposed to mere modern guess-work, most seem to me to bear the other way. But that a very great change of accentuation, word-production, tone, etc., *did* take place during the fifteenth century, the literary student can have no doubt, on the sure and certain testimony of literature itself, which cannot lie. Yet all beyond this is mist. We may guess (as it touches only a *dioti*, not a *hoti*) that the disuse of French and Latin in Southern parts, as media of instruction and conversation, concentrated the vernacular element, let it develop itself more freely and idiosyncratically. The same causes did

[1] The nearest similar instance is in the optional suppression and expression of the preterite and participial *ed*; but as this involves no necessary or usual alteration of spelling, it does not come into exact parallel.

not operate to the same extent in Scots, if they acted at all ; and therefore we do not there perceive the same effect. But in England the unhappy poet was evidently under a second disability, perhaps as troublesome to him as the first, and complicating the uncertainty of absolute and relative syllabic value. Less things than these two might, and these themselves almost must, have brought about the apparent chaos that reigns in the work of such men as Lydgate and Hawes.

As, however, we examine this chaos from a slightly different point of view, and take it in full connection with what follows, a suspicion may emerge that (as is often the case with chaos) it is not merely the ruin of something previous, but also the initiatory stage of something to come. There were capacities and capabilities in the substance of rhythmical English, when the reagent of metrical form was applied to it, which had not been developed by Chaucer, which Chaucer had not in the least attempted, or had attempted only in the least. He has equivalence, but he has it only in a limited degree. He has verses longer than the decasyllable, but he makes very scanty use of them. He almost pointedly neglects the fourteener, and its "resolved" form, the half common-measure. He steers clear, or is carried clear, of the mighty possibilities of the anapæst. Now if we look at these things behind, and then turn our attention to the other things before—the "tumbling verse," the Tudor "Poulter's measure," the apparently skimble-skamble long doggerel of the earlier plays—it will not be quite fantastic or gratuitous to conceive a certain striving, perhaps wholly, certainly in the main unconscious, towards some extension and emancipation of the staple line—an extension and emancipation of the nature and objects of which the writers have no clear idea. The amazing "flounder" of the worst stanzas of Hawes and Barclay becomes certainly less incomprehensible, though not much less amazing, if we regard it as not merely a failure to produce good Chaucerian decasyllables, but an attempt—a failure likewise, but a less hopeless failure—to produce something else.

And the likelihood of this state of "travail"—of embryonic trouble and disturbance—becomes more likely still when we turn to those more agreeable and inspiring, though much more anonymous and elusory attempts in ballad and lyric which have been also surveyed. Here the resolved fourteener, and the kindred extensions and resolutions, appear constantly; here not seldom the other tendency, not merely to use the anapæst as an occasional spurt and relief to the iambic line, but to make it the base of a newer, quicker measure, freer in its going and more capacious in its embrace. The relaxation of the decasyllable itself had few good points and many bad ones, but it had a faint soul of goodness in it. And even the reaction to a very strict view which we shall see to some extent in actual practice, and to a much greater in critical principle, was, though again a rather bad thing in itself, beneficial, in so far as it prevented innovating licence from going too far, while the vocabulary and the vocalisation of the language were in an unsettled state. Better poets than Lydgate and Hawes might have been of doubtful service to English poetry in the same conditions. No poets in any condition or at any time could have been more useful, as few could be more delightful, than the unknown author of the *Nut-brown Maid* and the disputed author of "Back and side, go bare, go bare."[1]

The reproach, therefore, of the fifteenth century on the score of poetry, as it is generally put in literary histories, and by common fame, is mightily taken away, from our point of view, by the considerations here advanced—considerations which, so far as I am aware, have never been seriously marshalled and supported before. No fight is indeed possible, even from the purely prosodic side, for any of the regular literary poetry of England in the narrow sense; the attempts which have been made, by and after the Germans,[2] to improve Lydgate's position are but vain

[1] "The bounties of King Bacchus and of my Lady Venus," as Prior Aymer has it, to their brother Apollo.

[2] Even Ten Brink, one of the most literary of them all, finds in Hawes "a decided talent for versification."

things fondly invented, and grounded as a rule upon absence of ear, misuse of eye and finger, and lost labour of ingenuity and wit. The Scottish poets proper—though they have been but a little overpraised by those who have praised them most, and have been most harshly, if not most ignorantly also, treated by those who have praised them least—exhibit the defects of an at least partly artificial and merely literary poetic, sometimes really accomplished, not seldom really vigorous, but with a certain want of "inevitableness" which gives little hope for the future, and which had, as a matter of fact, very little future before it. And in both we find the specially prosodic drawback that a prosody, itself drawn rather from the actual practice of one consummate artist than from any extensive comparison or intelligent theory, was being applied in England to a language which was rapidly changing its substance and its form, in Scotland to one which was made, not grown.

But when we turn to the great body of folk-song, ballad, religious and political verse, carol, tale, what not, the case is strangely altered. Nay, as happens not uncommonly, the very things which work mischief in the other departments work for good here. It is not that even here there is any large or constant proportion of pure imaginative poetic thought, or of accomplished poetic expression. The *Nut-brown Maid* and the great *Carol on the Nativity* have not many companions as wholes. But there is a good deal of scattered poetic quality even as it is; and this is not the point. The point is that at this very time, in this very dead water and transition period of English poetry, the not disorderly freedom of English prosody, in which it stands practically alone, was in a fashion wonderful, but by no means unnatural or unintelligible, actually established and secured. It may seem an enormous paradox, but is really not more than an admissible hyperbole, to say that it would have been unwise to barter these three generations of anonymous, unkempt, unartful, "rakehelly rhymers" for a minor, or even a major, Chaucer in each.

For Chaucer's work—great and estimable as it was from our special point of view as well as from the general one of poetic criticism—was done, did not want doing again, and might have been overdone. His task, as we have seen, was to regulate and modify and order these things, and he did it with consummate genius. But it was not his task—and we may even doubt whether it was the bent of his special genius—to develop the irregular side of English prosody, to give us the swing and sway of lyric, to utilise the elasticity and variety, while perfecting the harmony and melody, of trisyllabic equivalence.

Now this in a humble, but all the more effectual way, *was* the task of the anonymous folk-singers. It is very possible—indeed, much more than possible—that they could not have written the severer and more regular measures if they would; it is at least possible that they would not if they could; it is certain that we ought to thank God and them for not doing so. Thanks to them —not merely to

> the spinsters and the knitters in the sun,

not merely to the crooners of lullabies and the sighers of love ditties, not merely to the haunters of taverns and the mutterers of political lampoons, but to the very pious souls who mourned their sins and put up petitions or thanksgivings as the case might be — there was rooted and riveted the desire for, and the delight in, prosodic liberty. From the clear burning passion of

> For in my mind of all mankind,

through the savage exultation of

> For Jack Nape's soul Placebo and Dirige!

to the Bacchanalian ecstasy of

> I am so wrapt, and thoroughly lapt, in jolly good ale and old,

and the plaintiveness of Eve's

> Alas! that ever the speech was spoken,

the lesson is the same—a great, unceasing, unsilenceable

outcry of *Nolumus leges Angliae mutari* in the matter of syllabic equivalence. The ballad has been called, and the expression has been approved by good wits, "the life-buoy of English poetry." Never were there more of these buoys afloat, and ready to help, than during this age-long shipwreck, as it might seem, of the harmony of English verse.

It was fortunate, too, that the state of chaos prevented the formulation of any prosodic theory, until the freer rhythms were ineradicably established in the national ear and heart; that it was Gascoigne in the late sixteenth century who, and then with a sad and longing look backward, limited English feet in theory to the single iamb—not Lydgate or Occleve in the early fifteenth. Not everybody, perhaps, realises how constant the danger of this strange self-tyranny has been. For more than two hundred years it mastered the schools, if not exactly the courts, of the Muses with us; it can be seen almost within the last generation; I am not sure that it has not partisans even now. But in the very disorder, the very "pie," of the fifteenth century, order was taken against it, even though the disorder may be partly blamed for the critical reaction that followed. More than four-and-twenty blackbirds were baked in that pie: and ever since, when the pie has been opened, the birds begin to sing, and the delusion vanishes away.

NOTE ON THE THREE PRECEDING BOOKS

As we are now approaching what was long, and perhaps still to some extent is, regarded as the beginning of modern English poetry, it may be well to draw special attention to a point which affects almost all that goes before—a point glanced at more than once, but not dealt with at length. In order to appreciate the theory of Feet which governs this book, it is necessary to recognise that the writer does *not* maintain that they were invariably, or even for the most part, present, as such, to the mind of the poet. They may have had a potential rather than an actual value: *he* may have scanned lines not as we scan them, yet in such a way as justifies our scansion. Since the comparative settlement of pronunciation, and the deliberate study of metre, such *latent* scansions are less probable; yet they still occur. And at this time they were not so much probable as certain. That they can be detected and systematised, from the standpoint of a general and horizontal survey of English poetry, is one of the main contentions of this book. They bind the earliest and the latest together in a community of slowly developing order: while accent- and beat-systems throw the whole into a mere miscellany, if not into a mere mob.

BOOK IV

THE COMING OF SPENSER

CHAPTER I

THE TURN OF THE TIDE—ITALIAN INFLUENCE

Outline of subject—Specific quality, for the purpose, of Italian, and of the sonnet itself—Wyatt's general effect—The English sonnet—In Wyatt—In Surrey—Other forms—"Poulter's measure"—Wyatt's intertwisted decasyllables—Surrey's other metres—His blank verse.

Outline of subject.

THE full and patient examination which has been given to the progress of English prosody hitherto, and the summaries which have been interspersed, should make it unnecessary to repeat, at this last fresh start in the present volume, what was the state of the matter *circa* 1500-1525, and how it staggered. The influences which established it in a form, not merely stable, but capable of orderly and almost indefinite progression, are clear enough, but their exact nature has not always been rightly conceived, and the relations of them still less. Nobody can fail to be struck with the differences—specially prosodic as well as generally poetical—between a poet of 1500 and a poet of 1600; everybody may not understand to what and to whom these obvious differences are due. The causes, as I shall hope to show in the present book, are, in the main, and always leaving room for the incalculable, three—Italian influence, classical influence, and the two as combined and reflected in Spenser. In the present chapter we shall deal with the first, and with its well-known exemplification in the work of Wyatt and Surrey.

Specific quality, for the purpose, of Italian,

It would indeed be almost sufficient, though not quite accurate, to substitute for the two words "Italian influence" the four "influence of the sonnet," for it was

this powerful form which directly brought the influences of the language which had been its cradle, to bear. That the sonnet is a rather uncanny thing looked at from one point of view, an extraordinary "windfall of the Muses" looked at from another, most tolerably imaginative investigators of it have seen. We do not know at all whence or how it originally came: we can discern no really satisfactory reasons why fourteen lines should possess powers and capabilities which twelve and sixteen do not. It is rather *a posteriori* than *a priori* that we discern another pre-established harmony between itself and the language which fostered it, in the fact that Italian is the Pallas *and* the Aphrodite of modern tongues, in the already armed perfection with which it came into the world. But we get a little nearer to real examination, and not to that mere statement of the facts in an explanatory form which is so common and so delusive, when we begin to examine its actual conditions, and to see in what way they fitted it to be a corrective of the formal, and of something more than the formal, defects of English poetry.

and of the sonnet itself.

These defects, which English shared, to a certain extent, with other mediæval verse, but which had been developed in it, owing to causes already laid bare, with exceptional severity, were looseness and disorderliness of metre, a clumsiness of diction now gaudy, now grotesque, an indistinctness and awkwardness of expression, and a desultory exuberance of treatment both in matter and thought. Now on all these things the sonnet acted at once and directly, with an effect almost magical till the means of it are considered. Its form was extremely precise, and its comparatively small bulk and clear outline exposed any deformity at once and fatally. In order to produce its effect, striking and forcible or exquisite phraseology was necessary; there is nothing quite so null as an insignificant sonnet. Further, to prevent this insignificance there is almost necessarily required—and in all good Italian sonnets there is always present — some definite thought, feeling, picture, something that is not mere "meandering." And, lastly, the small space checks that

meandering automatically. In the century or so of words, which is about the average of a sonnet's contents, the most barren thinker can hardly be tempted to admit, the laziest and loosest must be shamed into at least trying to exclude, *clichés* and expletives. To have something to say; to say it under pretty strict limits of form and very strict ones of space; to say it forcibly; to say it beautifully: these are the four great requirements of the poet in general; but they are never set so clearly, so imperatively, so urgently before any variety of poet as before the sonneteer. And there had been no generation of poets before whom they so urgently *required* setting as before the English poets of the fifteenth and the very earliest sixteenth century.

Wyatt's general effect.

All this is illustrated almost as well by the shortcomings as by the successes of the two remarkable poets who heralded the Renaissance of English in poetry. That neither was a poet of absolutely the first class may be granted, otherwise they would have done more than they did; that they would, in other circumstances, have been not so far off it, is pretty well proved by their doing so much. But the examination of their work, and especially of Wyatt's, who is the pioneer and master, is extremely curious. We seem to be looking from afar at a man running or walking over a course beset with all sorts of visible stumbling-blocks and invisible snares, into which and over which he is perpetually stumbling and tumbling, yet picking himself up and pressing on towards the goal. When one comes to examine the matter, one finds that his adherence to his models has already almost saved him from one of the great sins of the English fifteenth century —the irregular and "go-as-you-please" line; but that he has not escaped—that he has rather exaggerated—two other faults in order to lessen this. One of these is capricious, if not altogether antinomian, accentuation; the other, uncertainty of rhyme, comes, as we saw, from rhyming suffixed words sometimes on the suffix, and sometimes on the last syllable of the main word. There is, moreover, still an occasional tendency to use the final *e* (which has

evidently been quite discarded as a staff) as a crutch to help a lame line out; and there are the ugly coalescences of "the," "to," etc., with a succeeding word beginning with a vowel.[1]

But it is of the first importance to observe that these surviving uglinesses are almost all traceable to that chaos of pronunciation which we have commented upon, and that most of them are committed out of a desire to make line and piece regular. The inharmonies of Lydgate and Occleve, of Hawes and Barclay, appear to be committed in sheer helpless ignorance of what harmony is, or of the means of attaining it—at the very best, in a muddled attempt to get some effect not clearly realised. But Wyatt knows what his ear wants, and not seldom attains it, though uncertainty in pronunciation and other things occasionally prevents him from doing so; while, to anticipate a little, his own efforts enable his immediate pupil

[1] I may perhaps be pardoned for quoting the scansion of Wyatt's first sonnet, with comment thereon; from my *Short History of English Literature*, pp. 246, 247 :—

> The longe | love that | in my | thought I | harbèr
> And in | my heart | doth keep | his re|sidence,
> Into | my face | presseth | with bold | pretence,
> And there | campèth | display|ing his | bannèr:
> She that | me learns | to love | and to | suffèr,
> And wills | that my | trust and | lust's * neg|ligence
> Be rein|ed by rea|son, shame, | and rev|erence,
> With his | hardl|ness tak|ès dis|pleasùre,
> Wherewith | love to | the hart's * fo|rest he | fleèth,
> Leaving | his en|terprise | with pain | and cry,
> And there | him hi|deth and | not àp|pearèth. |
> What may | I do? | when my | màster | fearèth,
> But in | the field | with him | to live | and die,
> For good | is thè | life | end|ing faithfully.

In one line, as we see above, he is driven to make "takes" a dissyllable, and to put an entirely non-natural quantification upon "hardiness," and "displeasure," which should simply change places in a nonsense verse. More surprising perhaps—for this liberty of stress is frequent in Chaucer, and continues to Spenser and even to Shakespeare—is the mistiness which seems to beset him in the matter of rhyme. It is clear that the first, third, and fourth rhymes of the sestet are on the *èth* only, yet he cannot resist the double rhyme "feareth" and "appeareth," though it not merely conflicts with the single rhyme of "fleeth," but itself introduces a quite false rhythm into the lines, making them in effect feminine-rhymed nine-syllable lines, and not decasyllables at all.

* Printed in Tottel "luste's" and "harte's," but I do not think any metrical value was meant to be given to the *e*. [Longe in l. 1 is different, and may have been meant. But in that case it will introduce a new fault in the rhyme.]

Surrey to do far better, and his not distant pupil Sackville to do wonderfully.

The English sonnet.

In regard to the sonnet, the chief achievement of both Wyatt and Surrey, I must take leave to be modestly peremptory, and not in the least apologetic, on one main point. Both, though not wholly or exclusively, incline to the form of sonnet which concludes with a couplet—the "English" form, as it might perhaps best be called—the "Shakespearian" form as it is usually called in opposition to the "Petrarchian."[1] Considering the English poetry and the poets that we have in this form, to speak of it with bated breath seems to me purely foolish; and I must add that to speak of it as "incorrect," "licentious," etc., seems to me purely impudent. These epithets may apply to the form in Italian. I am not in the least concerned with that.[2] But to use them in English is simply to fall into "the gainsaying of Core," into the error of Guest when he rated Milton himself for writing

> the cherub Con|templation,

and Shakespeare for writing

> Dead
> Is noble Timon.

In English, by the grace of God and the Muses, the poetry makes the rules, not the rules the poetry; and this particular form of sonnet is justified ten thousand times over by its works.

At the same time it is by no means certain that accident, as in most cases, or even error, as in some, had not something to do with the discovery of the English sonnet. By a really curious coincidence, the length in lines of the individual sonnet is exactly equivalent to that of a

[1] "Petrarchian," not "Petrarchan," as some have it. To begin with, Milton, who is something of an authority, writes "Petrarchian." In the second place, if people want to write English, "Petrarch" is the poet's name, and "Petrarchian" is, according to all analogy, its adjective. In the third, if they want to write Italian, his name is "Petrar*ca*," without any *h*, and its adjective is "Petrarcan."

[2] Petrarch himself, and a greater than Petrarch, Dante, who both use it, may settle with the objectors—if they like. I fear I know how Dante at least would have conducted the settlement.

couple of the stanzas which for more than a hundred years had been the favourite vehicle of serious English poetry—the rhyme-royal. More than one of Wyatt's sonnets actually falls into a pair of *quasi* rhyme-royal stanzas,[1] or, at least, into two septets of rhyme-royal character. And this would necessarily give the couplet conclusion. But men with the Italian, or even the French, patterns before them, possessing at the same time such ears as Wyatt and Surrey must have possessed, could not fail to perceive that this arrangement is wrong—that, unless very rarely practised and very carefully concealed, it "breaks the back" of the sonnet, destroys its unity, and provides no such rush and recoil of the wave as is given by the octave and sestet, or even, in the commonest English model, by the more daring distribution of douzain and couplet.

In Wyatt.

Accordingly, in the great majority of Wyatt's sonnets, although the rhymes of the first septet may terminate in rhyme-royal fashion, we find that the sense does not conclude there, but requires at least the eighth to complete it, and sometimes more. This necessarily introduces a new brand and cadence of symphonic character; and instead of the single effect of the rhyme-royal, with its couplet conclusion and stop, we get two quatrains, equally balanced, with the outside and the inside lines rhyming. Complete these with a third quatrain of the same kind and a couplet, and you have the quatorzain, already possessing the full wave-effect of advance and retirement. Surrey, on the other hand, has from the beginning (and from Wyatt) learnt this secret. The sheer double rhyme-royal effect is, I think, nowhere to be actually found in him, even where there is a distinct break at the seventh line. The structure, by rhyme and otherwise, of the second half prevents mere "splitting," and the intricacy and symphony of the sonnet are always tolerably preserved.

In Surrey.

Now the importance of this is difficult to exaggerate. There had been, in earlier English poetry, many stanzas of very great length and complexity—Chaucer himself

[1] In the first half especially: with rhyme twisted to *abbaacc*; but distinctly a *septet*. See examples at end of chapter.

had used them up to the dizain. But they had seldom or never acquired complete symphonic effect; they were merely loose congeries of lines, or of small stanzas braced together. Hardly beyond rhyme-royal itself, with a few exceptions for the octave, had this symphonic effect been attained. But even had it been, the sonnet was a new symphony, carrying with it, in the process of its imitative formation, the echoes of a language itself the most purely musical in Europe, and admirably calculated to serve as an alterative to English. You could not attain this music by the wooden stumping of the Lydgatian prosody; you could not attain it with the uncertain and chaotic syllable-values of the Lydgatian pronunciation. These things had to become new, and they became new; not yet in a state of perfection—that could not be expected—but in a state of most marvellous improvement.

Other forms.

But though the sonnet was, with one possible exception, infinitely the most important innovation of the pair, it was far from being the only one. They found in Italian, or perhaps in French,[1] numerous other forms which also they tried to introduce, and in all these forms the same desideratum of music presented itself. It was of great moment that so many of these poems and forms were *short*—madrigals, epigrams, single sixains or octaves, rondeaux, songs with or without a tendency to the refrain—"trifles," as they are called, of all sorts. Of very particular value are Wyatt's refrain-pieces such as that given below.[2] The value of the refrain has been more than once commented on already as furnishing a string of connection, fortification, and harmonising in the piece.

[1] I do not think it necessary to enter into this question. Probably both languages, the Italian at first, and the French (which was improving itself from the Italian) at second hand, exercised "the Italian influence."

[2] Forget not yet the tried intent
Of such a truth as I have meant,
My great travail, so gladly spent,
Forget not yet!

Forget not yet when first began
The weary life ye know, since whan
The suit the service none tell can—
Forget not yet!

Never was such a string more required than when Wyatt wrote ; and the value of it, exemplified in a hundred folk-pieces of merit, and often serving, even in the Lydgatian twilight, to give some gleam to more regular poetry, was abundantly recognised afterwards. For these trifles had at any rate this of not trivial about them, that they absolutely demanded an effort at least at *point*. Now the warmest champion of mediæval, and the stoutest apologist of fifteenth-century, poetry must admit that absence of point—presence of a verbiage at worst intolerable, and in all but the best examples too often afflicting—was perhaps their very greatest fault. And all these new models helped men at least to attempt to get out of it.

"Poulter's measure."

One of the forms which both Wyatt and Surrey practised, and which they made, or helped to make, exceedingly and rather disastrously popular with the generation immediately succeeding them, was not Italian at all. It was the celebrated "poulter's measure,"[1] or couplet of Alexandrine and fourteener, with only a single rhyme for the whole. This may be regarded from several points of view as to its nature and origin ; but the simplest and most natural is that which takes it as a modified ballad quatrain re-reduced to long instead of short lines, regularising the licence of six for eight in the first hemistich, cutting down the requirement of rhyme to the very lowest possible terms, and rejecting the presence of trisyllabic equivalence.

For this particular mercy it is rather difficult at the

[1] From the varying numbers of a nominal "dozen" of eggs. Hot cross buns, I think, have (in worthy cases) preserved latest the generous fourteen to the dozen. Thirteen *was* pretty common, and this, I believe, holds, against the author and in favour of the retailer, in the case of books. A more recondite origin of the "poulter's" might make it a concordat between the sixes and eights which we saw fighting early (see Appendix). For an example :

> So feeble is the thread that doth the burden stay
> Of my poor life in heavy light that falleth in decay—
> That but it have elsewhere some aid or some succoùrs
> The running spindle of my fate anon shall end his course.

But *ohe ! jam satis* begins to make itself heard whenever one begins to quote this measure. Still, we may return to it.

present day to be truly thankful ; but it is not so difficult to perceive why, for a time, it received so much patronage. The jog-trot of it—the butterwoman's rank to market—could not fail to be, and was soon, found out. But, on the other hand, the measure, for all its shortcoming, does get up a sort of semi-lyrical variety. It did not overtask the rhymer, and people were beginning to be troubled in their souls about rhyme ; it confined itself to common time, and people were beginning to think (as Gascoigne, himself regretting the fact, laid it down thirty or forty years later) that common time was the only time in modern English poetry. Most of all, perhaps, it served as a sort of bridge and compromise between literary and popular verse. However all this may be, it did actually become one of the most popular of metres with English versifiers for the whole centre-half of the sixteenth century, and even longer.

Wyatt's intertwisted decasyllables.

Far more satisfactory, and with an increasing dose of satisfaction as we pass from one to the other, are Wyatt's intertwined decasyllables and Surrey's blank verses. For the first are a very important and really germinal, though in themselves mistaken and insufficient, attempt at the new metring of certain special kinds of poetry, and the second are the admitted origins of one of the very greatest prosodic vehicles in our history. The best name for the metre of the remarkable poems which Wyatt addressed to John Poins and Sir Francis Brian is probably interlaced heroic couplets. It is usual to print them continuously, and that any other arrangement could hardly be satisfactory will be apparent from the example given below.[1]

[1] It will be seen that they could be arranged as sixains, isolated by the even rhymes, and keyed on to each other by the as yet unrhymed fifth line ending. Or they may be classed as simply *terza rima*, unskilfully written. One is certainly taken from Alamanni. But Wyatt has not got the *terza* movement at all. Indeed quatrains suggest themselves, and quintets, and almost anything.

> Mine own John Poins, since ye delight to know
> The causes why that homeward I me draw,
> And flee the press of courts where so they go
> Rather than to live thrall under the awe

All these poems are in a manner satires, and Wyatt seems to have wanted for them a metre which should combine the "go" of riding rhyme with a certain amount of stanza reverberation. But two things about the pieces are most curious. One is that in them he, probably in consequence of a deliberate notion that satiric verse may or must be rough, lapses into much more inharmonious lines than he allows himself elsewhere. The other is that this rather elaborately, though also rather promiscuously, rhymed system has more the effect of blank verse than of any rhyme whatever. The composition is by paragraphs rather than stanzas, and the paragraphs are articulated by full stops in the middle of the lines after a fashion which earlier poets had rarely allowed themselves. Wyatt, however, for all his Italian studies, did not adventure blank verse pure and simple. Surrey did.

Surrey's other metres.

For though the younger poet constantly exhibits the discipleship which, indeed, he makes not the slightest effort to conceal, he has, as has been said, learnt from his master more than that master himself had learnt. His sonnets are not merely more workmanlike in sheer arrangement, but they are better phrased, more concentrated in general ordonnance, and, consequently, more musical. His poulter's measure has less of the dot-and-go-one about it. His interlaced couplets or tercets or sixains (see above) are much less rough. And his other metres are very interesting—in particular his quatrains of eights, though they content themselves with alternate rhyme, already possess something of that in-

---

Of lordly looks, wrappèd within my cloke;
To will and lust learning to set a law—
It is not that because I scorne or mocke
The power of them whom Fortune here hath lent
Charge over us, of right to strike the stroke;
But true it is, that I have always meant
Less to esteem them than the common sort
Of outward things that judge in their intent
Without regard what inward doth resort.

We shall see attempts in this measure from the present piece to *Mano*; but successes will be rather to seek than to see in them.

effable seventeenth-century music which in the seventeenth century itself animates this form, and still more that with enclosed rhyme *abba*, as well as the common measure. And some of his other experiments are very happy. The sixain of eights, though capable of great prettiness, sometimes coasts too nearly that triviality which is conterminous with prettiness. But a seven-lined stanza, where a common measure quatrain leads to a triplet of two eights and a ten, has great charm, while his pure sixes have a mote-like gracility. The interlaced eights which he constructs on the principles of Wyatt's decasyllables are open to the same objections which fall on these, but I think less so.[1]

[1] Here are some examples :—

> The fire it cannot freeze,
> For it is not his kind ;
> Nor true love cannot lese
> The constance of the mind.
> Yet as soon shall the fire
> Want heat to blaze and burn,
> As I from such desire
> Have once a thought to turn.

The trochee at the beginning of line five is the sort of thing which shows at once the advance of the prosody and the aptness of the prosodist.

> As oft as I behold and see
> The sovereign beauty that me bound,
> The ni[gh]er my comfort is to me,
> Alas ! the fresher is my wound.
>
> As flame doth quench by rage of fire,
> And running streams consume by rain,
> So doth the sight that I desire
> Appease my grief and deadly pain.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Alas ! how oft in dreams I see
> Those eyes that were my food ;
> Which sometimes so delighted me
> That yet they do me good—
> Wherewith I wake with his return
> Whose absent flame did make me burn ;
> But when I find the lack, Lord ! how I mourn !

This assortment of line-lengths is very agreeable. "Poulter's" need hardly be given, though Surrey's are about the best of them. For sonnet and blank verse I cannot, I think, improve on the selections I made long ago in my *Elizabethan Literature* :—

But these prosodic achievements of Surrey's, as we look back on them, dwindle almost into insignificance. Wyatt had given us the sonnet, and had experimented in the small madrigal pieces; and if Surrey had not given the additional polish to these, no doubt somebody else would. But, once more, Wyatt had not attempted blank verse, and Surrey did attempt it.

His blank verse.

It would, of course, be gratuitous futility to argue that, as a matter of fact, Surrey did not take this pattern also from the Italians, who were then the only nation and

---

I never saw my lady lay apart
Her cornet black, in cold nor yet in heat,
Sith first she knew my grief was grown so great;
Which other fancies driveth from my heart,
That to myself I do the thought reserve,
The which unwares did wound my woeful breast.
But on her face mine eyes mought never rest
Yet, since she knew I did her love, and serve
Her golden tresses clad alway with black,
Her smiling looks that hid[es] thus evermore
And that restrains which I desire so sore.
So doth this cornet govern me, alack!
In summer sun, in winter's breath, a frost
Whereby the lights of her fair looks I lost.*

. . . . . .

It was the(n) night; the sound and quiet sleep
Had through the earth the weary bodies caught,
The woods, the raging seas, were fallen to rest,
When that the stars had half their course declined.
The fields whist: beasts and fowls of divers hue,
And what so that in the broad lakes remained,
Or yet among the bushy thicks of briar,
Laid down to sleep by silence of the night,
'Gan swage their cares, mindless of travails past.
Not so the spirit of this Phenician.
Unhappy she that on no sleep could chance,
Nor yet night's rest enter in eye or breast.
Her cares redouble: love doth rise and rage again,
And overflows with swelling storms of wrath.

---

* As printed exactly in both first and second editions this sonnet is evidently corrupt, and the variations between the two are additional evidence of this. I have ventured to change "hid" to "hides" in line 10, and to alter the punctuation in line 13. If the reader takes "that" in line 5 as="so that," "that" in line 10 as="which" (*i.e.* "black"), and "that" in line 11 with "which," he will now, I think, find it intelligible. Line 13 is usually printed:

"In summer, sun: in winter's breath, a frost."

Now no one would compare a black silk hood to the sun, and a reference to line 2 will show the real meaning. The hood is a frost which lasts through summer and winter alike.

language in Europe that had made considerable attempts at it. But it is not so futile as perhaps some may think, to point out that imitation of the Italians was by no means *necessary*, and that an independent experiment is by no means unthinkable. In the first place, the famous, or should be famous, arrangements of blank verse imbedded in the beginning of Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* may be an accident, but they certainly are a very curious accident.[1] In the second, though some old remarks on *Piers Plowman* and its metre are oddly mistaken, there remains the fact that, in Surrey's time, a large and not unpopular body of English verse which was unrhymed did exist, and that some of it was not very much farther from actual metrical arrangement, even in decasyllable, than some of the rhymed verse. But the third and strongest argument for an at least partly independent experiment, which may have been encouraged by Italian, but did not necessarily start from it, is to be found in the vast, if rather vague, contemporary striving to get rid of rhyme altogether as a barbarous mediævalism, and to fall back upon unassisted metrical arrangement in the manner of the ancients. Still, all this is speculation, though not uninteresting speculation. The fact of Surrey's blank verse translation of the second *Æneid* abides.

It has been said above that, as we look back, the importance of this almost dwarfs any other achievement of Surrey's, and it is true; but that importance is due much more to the glasses through which we look than to the actual object. For those glasses are Milton and Shakespeare, or, rather, the whole body of dramatic and

[1] A young man called Melibeus mighty and rich [begat]
Upon his wife, which called was Prudence,
A daughter which that called was Sophie.
[Upon] a day befel that he for his disport
Is went into the fieldès him to play,
His wif and eke his daughter hath he left, etc.

There are more; and it will be seen that "begat" and "upon" can be got into blank verse measure with other dispositions. So also

And many a song and many a lecherous lay

in the palinode at the end of the *Parson's Tale*. Nor these alone.

non-dramatic achievement in unrhymed decasyllables—an achievement which contains some of the very greatest things in English or any poetry, and which constitutes perhaps the most unique and distinguishing crown of English poetry itself. Here is the germ of that mighty tree; here the infant that was to grow into the demi-god.

The infant itself has at least sufficient of the heroic signs of infancy, and it has the swaddling clothes of an at least gigantic future. Perhaps the first characteristic which strikes the reader, and the last that remains with him, is the extreme and, were it not for the obvious allowance, the almost distressing stiffness of the versification. This stiffness, which continues at least till Marlowe, and was not entirely taken off even by him, or by Peele, or by anybody till Shakespeare, is a very natural and almost inevitable result of the fact of "blank" verse. Deprived of his usual crutches, or at least staves, of rhyme and stanza, the poet goes with the utmost deliberation, and is bent upon nothing so much as upon securing ten syllables or five feet in each line. He cannot help a sort of paviour's expectoration of relief when he gets to the end of it; or if that be too conceited, he thinks it safer to make the sense finish off where the sound breaks. It is not that he is afraid of metrical and grammatical overlapping; on the contrary there are frequent examples of it. But he seldom manages to avoid arranging the individual line so that it *might* end in sense as well as in sound with itself, and he still seldomer acquires the peculiar cadence which, so to speak, "shoots the bridge" at the end—which knits one line to the next. The verse, to transfer the old Greek terms for composition, is strung, not twisted; each line is a separate bead on the string.[1]

[1] It has occurred to me that the remarks on p. 308 perhaps need illustration. I therefore append a sonnet of Wyatt's to compare with Surrey's above, p. 314. Wyatt's falls into two septets with so clear a cleavage that Chalmers actually prints it as such. Surrey's has a couplet rhyme at six and seven, but does *not* suggest cleavage :—

Was never file yet half so well yfilèd,
To file a file for any smith's intent,
As I was made a filing instrument,
To frame other, while yet I was beguilèd.

But Reason, lo ! hath at my folly smilèd,
And pardoned me since that I me repent
Of my past years and of my time misspent.

For youth led me, and falsehood me misguided,
Yet this trust I have of great àpparence,
Since that deceit is aye returnable,
Of very force it is agreeable,
That therewithal be done the recompense :
Then guile beguilèd plainèd should be never,
And the reward is little trust for ever.

CHAPTER II

THE TURN OF THE TIDE—CLASSICAL INFLUENCE[1]

Twofold direction of this—Pseudo-classical "versing"—Metrical study.

Twofold direction of this.

To the inherent ancestral and substantive influences, the origin and progress of which has formed the matter of this volume, and to the powerful new stimulus of Italian models, there has to be added a new reagency, incalculably great in its volume and variety, and, by reason of its incalculableness, specially liable to be miscalculated—the influence of the classics under the new system of more or less scholarly study. The results of this influence take two forms, very intimately connected, and both concerning us, but still, for our purposes, better kept apart as much as may be. First, the result in actual verse-making, whether in the classical forms or not; secondly, the results in critical study of verse-making, whether in the classical forms or not. The second it will be better to postpone for reasons elsewhere stated; the first we may deal with here. But the importance of the division which has just been observed, in speaking of each of them, goes crosswise or inversely.

The fact simply is, postponing full enquiries into the reason of it, that classical scansion, as regards *metres*, not *feet*, and attempted in special reference to the hexameter and elegiac measures, is, has always been, always must be,

[1] The length of this chapter is in directly and purposely inverse ratio to the importance of the subject. I hope that not a page of the entire work has failed, or will fail, to bring that importance home. But see the Inter-chapter following this Book, and also the note opposite.

a failure and an absurdity in English. That it has been —that it is at this moment—an infirmity of noble minds, is true, but quite irrelevant. Such minds have never been proof against amentia and dementia of various sorts. We shall note the cases as they occur. But what is interesting here is that the failure, the reasons of it, the temptations to it, and so forth, are obvious from the very first.

Pseudo-classical "versing.

No matter what examples[1] we take—the lumbering distich (its faults practically admitted by its citer and praiser Ascham) of Bishop Watson, which serves as the original sin in this kind; the methodical madnesses of Stanyhurst; the probably half-intentional grotesques of Harvey; the antiphysic contortions of such an All-Master of English harmonies as Spenser himself—the plague-mark stares us in the face—the hopeless flaw in the instrument dins us in the ears—at once, and unmistakably. These men were too honestly innocent—and perhaps English prosody in their days was too tentatively uncertain—for it to be possible for them to disguise the metre as later writers, especially Kingsley, have disguised it, and to make it a beautiful thing, but not dactylic or even hexametrical at all: they really did "expose its *cui bono* in all its naked deformity."[2]

[1] All travellers do gladly report great praise of Ulysses,
For that he knew many men's manners and saw many cities.
Watson, ap. Asch. *Schoolmaster*, p. 73, ed. Arber.

But the Queene in meane while carks quandare deepe anguisht,
Her wound fed by Venus, with firebayt smoldred is hooked:
Thee wights doughtye manhood, leagd with gentilytye nobil,
His woords fitlye placed, with his heunly phisnomye pleasing,
March throgh her hert mustring, al in her breste deepelye she printeth.
Stanyhurst, *Æn.* iv. 1-5, ed. Arber, p. 94.

What might I call this tree? A Laurell? O bonny Laurell.
Needes to thy bowes will I bow this knee and vayle my bonetto.
Harvey in letter to Spenser, *Eliz. Crit. Essays*, ed. Gregory Smith, i. 106.

See yee the blindefolded pretie god, that feathered archer
Of lovers miseries which maketh his bloodie game.
Spenser in letter to Harvey, *ibid.* i. 99.

[2] For this reason it would be unfair, as well as premature, to examine the whole subject of the English hexameter here. The proper time and place for such an examination will be when we have surveyed the attempts of nineteenth-century writers.

But thereby, and in addition, they exhibited other things of the greatest moment to us. In the first place, their proceeding was a confession unmistakable—and indeed self-confessed, though in details it was mightily mistaken—of the staggering state of English prosody, of the sense of that state, and of the desire to amend it. There is no need to add to what has been said already in the last book as to the fact of the staggers, and very little (all important as the point is) need be said as to the *prima facie* means of restoring equilibrium which classical metres seemed to offer. Our verse appeared to "go as it pleased," with the result that it hardly "went" at all, and certainly did not go to the pleasure of anybody with an ear. Classical or at least Latin verse (for to Greek, which had really the better prescriptions for them, they did not pay so much attention) "went" to admiration, and according to very strict rules. What more natural, what therefore more excusable in a way, than the idea that, if you transplanted the rules, they would bear the same fruit in the new ground?

Metrical study.

They did not; and by that marvellous "Fortune of England" which has been so often noted in and out of politics, the fact was found out, in actual experiment, by one who was not only among the very greatest of English poets generally, but one of the very greatest of English poets on the formal side. It is at least possible that Spenser might not have been what he most assuredly is, the founder of modern English prosody and modern English poetic diction alike, if he had not gone through this "distemper." It is at any rate certain that he went through it, and that after going through it he refounded English poetry. Putting aside, however, for the moment this effect of the study and practice of classical metres as a "Rule of False," it—and to a still larger extent, and in a less dangerous and adulterated fashion, the frank study of the classics in and for themselves—could not but have a great and beneficial influence on English prosody as well as on every other department, phase, and condition of English literature. For if there was one thing that such study

indicated more than another, it was the necessity of a certain "standardisation"—the law that verse *has* laws, and cannot be made by merely pitchforking together unselected words, and leaving the heaps to correspond at the hazard of the pitchfork. The mere fact that there were metrical treatises among the actual classical texts—that even these, as it seemed, divinely gifted artists had taken their art in a quite serious and scholastic fashion—could not fail to have its effect; the pattern and example of the accomplished masterpieces could not fail to have much more. The less definitely the example was taken, the more entirely literal acceptance of the precepts was avoided, the better; but example, and even precept to some extent, could not but establish an atmosphere—set up a tendency and a habit—in the sphere of poetic working. *They* had got over their difficulties (the poet would say to himself), so might he: not by slavish imitation of their methods, but by free adoption of their spirit.

CHAPTER III

THE POETS BETWEEN SURREY AND SPENSER

Constituents — Predominance of the fourteener — Googe — His snapped verses — Turberville — Tusser — Gascoigne — The later miscellanists — The translators — Sackville — The *Mirror for Magistrates*.

Constituents.

THE poets with whom we have to deal under the above heading, excepting Sackville, are not commonly thought of as possessing any very great attraction: nor will they, even prosodically, afford us very copious or succulent pasture. But they supply too definite, and therefore too important, a division of the subject to be passed by. Moreover, Sackville himself is an admirable verse-smith, and Gascoigne, besides being not despicable,[1] has for us the especial interest of being our first poet who busied himself definitely about prosody. His small but notable performance in this respect must indeed be postponed for the present, but it adds interest to his accomplishment in verse itself.

The subjects of the chapter may be stated as comprising Googe, Turberville, Tusser, and Gascoigne himself as independent subjects; then the minor authors of Tottel's and the subsequent Miscellanies; then the translators; and lastly Sackville, dominating, but bringing with him and under his In[tro]duction, the contributors to the *Mirror for Magistrates*.

Prosodically speaking, this whole period is permeated

[1] Puttenham's almost classical praise of him "for a good metre and a plentiful vein" is justifiable even absolutely; relatively to his own contemporaries it needs no justification.

by the fourteener, either in its "poulter's" combination with the Alexandrine, or simple of itself. This metre—perhaps, as we have seen, the very oldest in English poetry proper—has, in its eight hundred years or thereabouts of life, been the vehicle of much delightful poetry, even directly and in its extended but strictly syllabic form: while when separated into eight and six, whether equivalenced or not, it can challenge any other in almost all the functions and expressions of poetry, grave and gay, sweet and solemn, impassioned and decorative. But it has always been a very uncertain and risky metre, settling down with a dangerous acquiescence into doggerel and sing-song, into the pedestrian and the bathetic. At this time it seems not merely as if it could easily sink to these things, but as if it could not possibly rise above them. Even Wyatt and Surrey, as we saw, had not been very happy with it. It is notable that Sackville, the other most poetical poet before Spenser, avoids it. Although in Phaer and some others there are redeeming passages, the general run of work in it is either soporific or exasperating. We have to wait for Southwell's "Burning Babe," if not for Chapman's "Homer" (neither to be treated in this volume) before it gives us really inspired and inspiring poetry.

Predominance of the fourteener.

Barnabe Googe[1] is certainly "not the magician," as Longfellow's *belle dame sans merci* said to her lover. The most rabid fanatic of Romanism ought to read (as perhaps nobody else could) his translation of Kirchmeyer's *Regnum Papisticum* with pleasure, for the drivelling silliness of the phrase and the lolloping amble of the verse. Of his other translations, editors and reprinters have been less cruelly lavish, though the version of the *Zodiacus Vitæ* of Palingenius seems to have animated the spavined jade of his muse a little more. But his original poems, a bearable small volume which we owe to Mr. Arber, will best occupy us.

Googe.

It is noticeable that in these the verses are much

His snapped verses.

[1] Ed. Arber (London, 1871) for his original poems with some extracts from the others; ed. R. C. Hope (London, 1880; a book far too handsome for its stuff) for his *Regnum*.

broken up, not merely the fourteeners themselves, but even the decasyllables. This may be partly due to the fancy for small books and pages, but cannot be wholly so; and it may more logically be connected with the very rigid cæsura which the poets of the time imposed upon themselves. The effect is, beyond all doubt, most unfortunate. The ineffable bathos of verse like that given below,[1] may be partly due to the arrangement; the very easy and obvious experiment of rearranging it in actual decasyllable will show that it is not wholly so. The broken-up fourteeners themselves are not quite so hopeless.[2] But the very simplest stanza, when Googe permits himself to use it, shows pretty clearly where the fault lies. The fact is, that except in such stanzas, where they at once felt themselves secure and had tolerable room, these poets only escape Scylla to fall into Charybdis.[3] They have learnt to avoid the fault of their predecessors from Lydgate to Hawes, and so not to stagger; but in order to avoid it they can do nothing better than stump.

Turberville.

Turberville[4] is a better poet than Googe, but he is not much more important for prosody. His numerous but somewhat undistinguished pieces are written in six-lined stanzas of tens or eights, in decasyllabic quatrains alternately rhymed, in the usual split poulter's measure, in sixains of four four six, four four six, and in some most original combinations which are among the evidence

[1] The greatest vyce
That happens unto men
And yet a vyce
That many common have,
As auncient writers
Waye with sober pen.
Etc.

[2] Synce I so long have lyved in paine
And burnt for love of thee,
O cruel hart! dost thou no more
Esteame the love of me?

This is of course in effect, though not perhaps in intention, ballad metre, and takes the benefit thereof. But see *infra*, p. 326, note, on these "snapped" metres.

[3] Such as the sixains, "The oftener seen the more I lust," or "The rushing rivers that do run."

[4] In Chalmers, vol. ii.

of the good done by "Skeltonics" when, their formlessness being felt, efforts were made to trim them up. It is one of the proofs of Guest's want of ear for true English poetry that he condemned short lines *as such*,[1] and the eighteen-lined stanzas of Turberville's "Lover," of which one is given below,[2] are most pleasant examples of verse in their tiny flights from flower to flower. He is good, too, in the quatrain of three tens and a four, where, however, he is lazy enough (the tens are triplets) to leave the short line in "the air" and rhymeless.[3] Nor is he always without skill in alternate eights; but his common measure, which occurs seldom, and his more frequent split poulters noticed above, do not escape the "butter woman's rank to market," the hopeless and heart-breaking jog-trot of this particular time.[4]

[1] *English Rhythms*, ed. Skeat, p. 179 *sq.*

[2] Even so fare I
That am as nigh
My pleasure,
My treasure,
As I might wish to be;
And have at will
My Lady still
At leisure,
In measure
As well it liketh me.
The amorous blinks flee to and fro,
With sugred words that make a show
That fancy is well pleased withal
And finds itself content:
Each other friendly friend doth call
And each of us consent.
And thus we seem for to possess
Each other's heart and have redress.

Ed. cit. p. 590.

The spelling is very little modernised.

[3] In the piece beginning—

For cause I still preferred the truth before
Shameless untruth, and loathsome leasing's lore,
I find myself ill recompensed therefor
Of thee, my tongue.
For good desert and guiding thee aright,
That thou for aye mightst live devoid of spight,
I reap but shame and lack my chief delight,
For silence kept.

[4] He deserves, however, praise for a split Alexandrine measure (the twelve splits unequally much better than the ten)—

How may it be that snow and ice
Engender heat,

Tusser.

Tusser[1] is, I believe, commonly thought of, by those who think about him at all nowadays, as a writer of peculiarly lolloping anapæsts; and he certainly does write these to satiety and a good deal beyond it.

> Now leeks are in season for pottage full good,
> And spareth the milch cow and purgeth the blood:
> These having with peason for pottage in Lent,
> Thou sparest both oatmeal and bread to be spent.

"It do not over-stimulate," but it is far from negligible in a history of prosody. If it is ungainly there is a certain alertness, and even ease, in its ungainliness—an odd but by no means very uncommon combination of qualities. It shows not merely that the metre was quite familiar to the writer, but that he knew it would be familiar to the homely class of readers for whom he was catering, and whom he knew so well. Moreover, it is a curious piece of counter-evidence to Gascoigne's statement (made not many years after the *Points of Husbandry* first appeared, and when they were still issuing in new editions every two or three years from the press)[2] that there was no recognised foot in English but the iamb. It affords,

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which he arranges in fours of these distichs, tipped with an octosyllabic couplet, or in pairs similarly finished. This last gives his best and best-known piece, "The green that you did wish me wear." Exception has been taken to my regarding these metres as "split" or "snapped" Alexandrines; and undoubtedly later poets have used the eight-and-four, and even the six-and-four, with great effect as genuine couplets, while the split fourteener, as I have already acknowledged, has only to "stick a feather in its bonnet" and call itself common or ballad measure, to challenge the crown of the causeway. Nevertheless, to my ear, eye, and brain, these peculiar measures at this peculiar time *are* snapped things, and not natural pairs. And I judge them to be so, not merely *a posteriori* by these effects, but *a priori* from the evident need of the poets in all ways to be "kept straight." The six or eight completed is something done, something in hand towards completion of decasyllable or Alexandrine or fourteener—just as in newspaper offices they say that the novice always writes his first paragraph about anything in heaven and earth, so that he may at least have one in hand towards the sacred three. I shall probably have further instances to bring forward of similar prosodic *counterfeiting*.

[1] English Dialect Society, 1878. There is also a very handsome and, to those who do not read for linguistic purposes, sufficient edition by Mavor (London, 1812, 4to).

[2] The *Hundred Points* appeared in 1557, and had at least *four* editions before the *Five Hundred Points* succeeded them in 1573, to be reprinted at least *ten* times before 1600.

too, in our own division, another singular contrast—that with the rhyme-royal of the first treatise on husbandry in English verse, the anonymous translation of Palladius some century and a quarter earlier. Then an author who "trusted the people" as Tusser did might have used anapæsts too, but it would have been in the less regular but more spirited form of *Gamelyn*.

Tusser, however, has a store of other metres, and though he seldom has the opportunity to show himself a poet, and never takes it when he has it, he continues to show the variety of vehicle which was open to any English verser, poet or not, if he chose to avail himself of it, and the escape from staggering and stumbling which was being provided by the advance—not a complete advance yet, but a considerable one—towards recognised pronunciation and accent. The first chapter of his dedicatory epistle is in sixains, partly acrostic, of very regular eights, rhymed *ababcc*; his second in octaves 77767776, *aaabcccb*, the triplets being double-rhymed—an arrangement, as modern poets have shown, of great capacities, but here comically prosaic. "To the Reader" is in somewhat regularised and sometimes not ineffective Skeltonics; the Introduction[1] in a sort of "wheeled" stanza, composed of two quatrains, alternately rhymed eights, for front and rear rank, and a centre triplet of fours. Chapter V., the "Preface," is especially interesting, for it is in lines of three anapæsts, the metre which Shenstone resuscitated two centuries later;[2] and VI. is perhaps still more so,

[1] Good husbandmen must moil and toil,
To lay to live, by laboured field:
Their wives, at home, must keep such coil
As their like acts may profit yield.
For well they know,
As shaft from bow,
Or chalk from snow,
A good round rent their lords they give,
And must keep touch in all their pay;
With credit crackt else for to live,
Or trust to legs and run away.

[2] What lookest thou herein to have?
Fine verses thy fancy to please?
Of many my betters that crave:
Look nothing but rudeness in these.

because it is one of the "places" for that debated and most debatable foot, the amphibrach. It consists, as the extract below[1] will show, of alternate couplets, one composed of proverbial saws in the debatable metre, and the other of the ordinary four-foot anapæstics. The unmixed anapæst appears for two chapters, and then we pass to iambic dimeters, rhymed and sometimes mono-rhymed in couplets to any extent. And later, the anapæstic quatrain and the iambic couplet have most of the book between them, with the Skeltonic monometer sometimes, with others above named and some not yet named at all, less frequently.[2] Among these, as indeed we should expect, is the resolved poulter's measure or 6686 (the "short measure" of the hymn-books, but a very unequal companion to C.M. and L.M.), a sonnet or two, Romance sixes, fourteeners, etc. For prosodic variety the book is hard to match.

Gascoigne.

Gascoigne[3] himself underlies the curse of the time,

[1] Lĕt hoūse hăve | tŏ fĭll hĕr,
Lĕt lānd hăve | tŏ tĭll hĕr.
No dwellers—what profiteth house for to stand,
What goodness unoccupied bringeth the land.

Here, it may be granted freely, the amphibrachic scansion of 1 and 2 looks almost imperative. But if we read on—

No la|bour no bread
No host | we be dead,

and

Ill fa|ther no gift,
No know|ledge no shrift,

the persistence of the anapæst throughout reasserts itself, and we see that the double rhyme has beguiled us.

[2] Such as the mono-rhymed sevens to "Sit down, Robin, and rest thee," and the curious jingle, better known than anything else of the author's, of which the stanza usually quoted is that on Eton and Udall and *alti guai*. The next, on Cambridge, is cheerfuller (for the metre cf. p. 137)—

To London hence, to Cambridge thence,
With thanks to thee, O Trinity,
That to thy Hall, so passing all,
I got at last.
There joy I felt, there time I dwelt,
There Heaven from Hell I shifted well,
With learned men, a number then,
The time I past.

[3] In Chalmers, ii.; but better, ed. W. C. Hazlitt, London, 1869-70, 2 vols. Part by Arber, in *English Reprints*, including the prose criticism which is dealt with later.

though, as we have allowed, he is not wholly destitute of "good metre." The restless and tentative spirit, which has given him so many "firsts" in the tables of literary historians, showed itself here also. He certainly did not reck his own rede as to "hunting of the letter"; and he succumbs, like the rest, to the apparently inevitable jog-trot now and then. But there is something in him which wrestles with these difficulties always, and which sometimes, and not so very seldom, overcomes them. The really charming "Lullaby of a Lover"[1] owes much of its charm to the deftness with which the octave of eights, rhymed, not alternately throughout but *ababccdd*, is managed. His unsplit "poulters" are sometimes not ineffectual; he can manage rhyme-royal, though not with the mastery of Sackville; his continuous decasyllables, rhymed like Wyatt's in a linked fashion, which may resolve itself into tercets or quintets divided with no regard to sense, have some vigour.[2] One rather elaborate stanza he has,[3] which is not a great success.

The minor writers in *Tottel* and the contributors to

[1] Sing lullaby, as women do,
Wherewith they bring their babes to rest,
And lullaby can I sing too,
As womanly as can the best.
With lullaby they still the child;
And if I be not much beguiled,
Full many wanton babes have I
Which must be stilled with lullaby.

For fuller extract see *edd. cit.* or my *Elizabethan Literature*, p. 17.

[2] He is extremely given, like most early and some later Elizabethans, to the rhetorical-prosodic device of epanaphora, or beginning of successive lines with the same word. *E.g.* in *Dan Bartholomew of Bath*, four lines beginning "And canst thou," followed by three "Is this."

[3] *E.g.* in his *De Profundis*—

From depth of dool wherein my soul doth dwell,
From heavy heart which harbours in my breast,
From troubled sprite which seldom taketh rest,
From hope of Heaven, from dread of darksome Hell—
Oh, gracious God, to Thee I cry and yell.
My God, my Lord, my loving Lord alone,
To Thee I call, to Thee I make my moan;
And thou, good God, vouchsafe in full to take
This woful plaint,
Wherein I faint,
Oh hear me then for thy great mercies' sake.

The later miscellanists.

the subsequent miscellanies[1] of the earlier, or mostly præ-Spenserian, Elizabethan time may seem likely to give us plenty of material. But what would have to be said about them has been to a very large extent anticipated, in speaking of Wyatt and Surrey formerly, and of the poets already discussed in the present chapter. For poetical (or unpoetical) interest of various kinds a good deal might be cited; prosodically very little need be. Grimald himself hardly deserts the decasyllable and its "majors"—handling them for the most part with equal gravity and dulness. The "Uncertain Authors" show more lyrical *nisus*, but to very little effect. Nor, as we pass from *Paradise* to *Gallery* and from *Gallery* to *Handful* (though the *Handful* is the best of them as poetry) does any give us very much that is prosodically new. They are important, and of the first importance, as showing the immense stir—the "fervency of work"—that was abroad; but Spenser has not come to show the workers mastery in mowing their meadow. The most notable, as the best, of Edwards is given by the pleasant fourteeners of "The falling out of faithful friends renewing is of love." The octave of eights, *ababccdd*, not uncommon in the *Gallery*, is not very "gorgeous." One hopes, in reading the double rhymes of

> Though Fortune cannot favour
> According to my will,
> The proof of my behaviour
> Shall be to love you still,

that they are going to continue; but all the rest are single. There are some pretty refrains; the good effect of this (you may almost judge a man's taste in poetry by his fancy for refrains) has been noticed. A little more skill would have made a very pretty thing indeed of the form

[1] *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, 1576 (reprinted by Sir Egerton Brydges in 1810); *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, 1578; *A Handful of Pleasant Delights*, 1584. The two last are in Park's *Heliconia* (the *Handful* also in Mr. Arber's *Scholar's Library*), while Mr. Collier reprinted all. *The Phœnix Nest*, 1593, is prosodically very interesting, but distinctly *post*-Spenserian.

given below.[1] There are some internal rhymes. The interspersing of "bob" lines (two- or four-syllabled) between octosyllabic couplets or quatrains, arranged on no obvious principle, has at least a quaint effect, and the "Willow Song" set Mr. Gilbert his pattern three hundred years before *The Mikado*.[2]

The *Handful of Pleasant Delights* has the special attraction of consisting almost wholly of songs written expressly to tunes the names of which are given. Here are the actual words of the air, "Attend thee, go play thee," to which others, from the *Gorgeous Gallery*, have just been quoted. Here is the heart-rejoicing refrain—the substance is less succulent—of

> Greensleeves was all my joy,
> Greensleeves was my delight,
> Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
> And who but Lady Greensleeves!

Here are many other complicated stanzas, reminding one of the lyrics which rang the bell of the fourteenth century "To the Quarter Brawls," "To the Cecilia Pavin," "To 'Row well, ye Mariners.'" Only—and it is a point to which we shall have to return—one has, while admitting the great stimulating force of music, to hint or re-hint a doubt whether, by itself, it can do much for prosody save suggest. The verse, though elaborate, is still almost always wooden;

> [1] Not light of love, lady,
> Though fancy do prick thee,
> Let constancy possess thy heart:
> Well worthy of blamyng
> They be and defaming,
> From plighted troth which back do start.
> Dear dame!
> Then fickleness banish
> And folly extinguish,*
> Be skilful in guiding,
> And stay thee from sliding,
> And stay thee,
> And stay thee!
>
> [2] My love, what misliking in me do you find?
> Sing all of green willow!
> That on such a sudden you alter your mind—
> Sing willow—willow—willow.

* Why not "And let folly vanish"? or "And folly let vanish"?

the rhymes are careless, sometimes mere assonances; the maze is trodden blindly and clumsily, though some hold may be kept on the actual clue.[1] The magician has not come.

The translators.

The great bulk of the earlier Elizabethan translation is in the fourteener, the dominant verse, as has been said, of the time. This Phaer in his *Virgil*, and still more perhaps Arthur Golding in his *Ovid*, managed with considerable skill, and may have given Chapman the key-note which he used so triumphantly. But while the broken fourteener (see those editions where Warner's *Chronicle* is so printed) can never be suitable for long narrative poems, it does not seem to me that these worthy scholars much exceeded Warner himself, or came anywhere near Chapman at his best, in the unbroken. We may, however, perhaps return to them for comparative citation when we come to the "metaphrast of Homer."

Sackville.

Sackville's[2] dramatic work will come in better for notice in the dramatic context, but a word here must be vouchsafed to the magnificence of his rhyme-royal in the *Induction* and the *Complaint of Buckingham*, of the *Mirror*

[1] Take, for example, the "Quarter-brawls" piece on Diana and Actæon:—

Diana and her darlings dear
Walked once, as you shall hear,
Through woods and waters clear,
  Themselves to play.
The leaves were gay and green,
And pleasant to be seen,
They went the trees between
  In cool array.
So long that at the last they found a place
  Of waters full clear:
So pure and fair a bath ne'er was
  Found many a year.
There she went fair and gent
Her to sport as was her wonted sort,
  In such desirous sort.
Thus goeth the report,
Diana dainteously began herself therein to bathe,
And her body for to lave,
So curious and brave.

Elsewhere "scape," "shape," and "fate" rhyme, "him" and "skin," etc.

[2] Ed. Sackville-West, London, 1859. The poems are very brief, and their best passages are widely known through many anthologies, especially Mr. Ward's *Poets*.

for Magistrates. The word just used is not too strong, for this is not only the finest piece of versification in southern English between Chaucer and Spenser, but requires no comparison, or historic limitation, of any kind. The triumph of a poet, from the prosodic point of view, is to bring out the *special* quality of his metre, and this Sackville does as few have done before or since. The "magnificence" of the *Induction* is very mainly due to the extraordinary skill with which the metre is arranged, and with which the diction is selected and adapted to the metre. It is remarkable that the means adopted are by no means copied from, or directly suggested by, Chaucer's earlier triumphs in the sadder part of *Troilus.* There epanaphora, or the recurrent opening of lines, is the chief means adopted; and the pause in the lines (though a shrewd critic like Gascoigne observed that variety in this was always permitted to rhyme-royalists) is not widely varied. Now Sackville, though his contemporaries (Gascoigne himself was one[1]) were very fond of this figure, employs it little, while he plays on pause-variety almost, though not quite, to the Guest-enraging length of putting it at the first or ninth syllable. In the first line especially it is often neglected altogether with excellent effect. It occurs frequently at the second syllable, and by no means seldom at the seventh or eighth. Moreover Sackville,[2] in thus anticipating Spenser, and differing from almost all poets since Chaucer himself, knows perfectly well how to distribute words of special colour, weight, and resonance, so as to communicate these qualities to

[1] See note above.

[2] To illustrate the above remarks properly his whole work would have to be quoted, and this, though it is not bulky, would hardly do. Every word in the above has been carefully weighed. But one famous stanza must grace the page with its beauty :—

> Thence came we to the horror and the hell,
> The large great kingdoms, and the dreadful reign
> Of Pluto in his throne where he did dwell;
> The wide waste places, and the hugy plain,
> The wailings, shrieks, and sundry sorts of pain,
> The sighs, the sobs, the deep and deadly groan—
> Earth, air, and all resounding plaint and moan.

Not a word or a note wrong; not even "hugy" where it is.

the line and the stanza where they occur. On the whole we have, allowing for his somewhat narrow range and scale, hardly a greater verse-smith in English. This greatness appears clearly enough in his work when, as it usually is, it is isolated from its original companions. It would be even more telling to many people if they were able to contrast it with the vast and dreary bulk of the *Mirror for Magistrates* itself. Some of the remaining collaborators, Phaer, Ferrers, and others, were men not contemptible, but they very seldom produced anything but what Spenser would call "dreriment." Nor did any of those who succeeded them, in the curious series of additions and refashionings which the work underwent for full half a century, show better parts or find better luck. The favourite measure in the *Mirror* is rhyme-royal with some varieties and "sports"—Ferrers, who seems to have been fond of the Alexandrine (see *infra*), making an experiment in that.[1] But it is all "barren! barren!"[2]

The *Mirror for Magistrates.*

[1] The Alexandrine rhyme-royal of the article on Chief-Justice Tresilian (to be found at the beginning of vol. ii. in Haslewood's ed.). It would be an ugly thing even if exact, and Ferrers is *not* exact.

[2] The non-dramatic work of Heywood (*v. inf.* p. 337), as contained in his *Proverbs and Epigrams*, Spenser Society (1867), is mainly couched in middle-sized doggerel closely approaching regular anapæsts, but sometimes shifting back to the decasyllable or something like it, and in the *Epigrams* occasionally shrinking, as we might expect, to quite short and almost regular iambics.

CHAPTER IV

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA TO MARLOWE

The great transition—Its chief plank: doggerel Alexandrines—Bale's *King Johan*—*St. Mary Magdalene*, etc.—*Heywood*, etc.—Progress of the doggerel—Examples—*The Four Elements*—*Calisto and Melibœa*—*Every Man*, etc.—Others—And others again to Shakespeare—The metrical aspect of the doggerel group—The infancy of blank verse—*Gorboduc*—Contrast of potentiality and later achievement—The *Misfortunes of Arthur*—The Marlowe group.

The great transition.

AT the time with which we are dealing the influence of the drama on prosody, and *vice versa*, is approaching, though it has not yet reached its period of highest interest and importance. But it continues, in increasing measure, to reflect the prosodic changes of the time. The very uncertain dates of some, perhaps of most, of the pieces[1] which represent the period of 1500-1580 do not obscure the general drift and progress of the matter. And, full of interesting contrasts as the history is, when once it has been cleared from the obstacles which have so long intercepted the view, there are not many more striking than that of the elaborate-stanzaed Moralities with which, as distinguished from the Mysteries formerly surveyed, we open, and the blank verse of Peele and Marlowe with which we close. In Skelton's *Magnificence* we are still prosodically, as otherwise, in full Middle Age; with *David*

[1] Mr. Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, London, 15 vols., 1874-76, is still the only *thesaurus* of the drama of this period, though a few plays have been separately re-edited by others, and still fewer added to its contents, especially by Herr Alois Brandl. A re-arranged and amplified collection has been begun by Mr. Farmer (London, privately printed, vols. i. and ii.).

and Bethsabe and *Dr. Faustus* we are in presence of vehicles which, slightly but not materially altered, are the vehicles of tragedy to-day. Nor is the bridge of doggerel between the two less interesting, though it may be more puzzling, than either.

Its chief plank —doggerel Alexandrines.

Bale's *King Johan*.

One single play, and a very remarkable one, would suffice to show the difficulty of characterising with any exactness this doggerel play-metre. I refer to Bale's *King Johan*,[1] the undeniable[2] point of junction between the Interlude and the Chronicle-play, and almost that between the Morality and the Modern Drama generally. There is no doubt that, on the principles of Procrustes, and without perhaps pushing those principles to extremity, the norm of the metre is Alexandrine. By no very violent compression or extension you can always get the twelve syllables, and generally that middle cæsura with which, in English, the continuous Alexandrine seems to find it nearly as hard to dispense as in French. But an Alexandrine that runs easily and *cleverly*—that dispenses not merely with jamming or tugging, but with unnatural slurs and unnatural emphasis—is even rarer than a decasyllable of the same conditions in Lydgate or Barclay. Such a line as, for instance—

> And that shall King Johan[3] prove shortly, by the rood!

is so rare that in the double page-opening where it occurs (Camden Soc. ed., pp. 28-29) I can find but one other, and that not so good—

> With his authority, and then the game is o'er,

which even approaches it. Yet the Alexandrine *aura* is, one may say, omnipresent, and we can see very well

[1] Ed. Collier, for the Camden Society (London, 1838).

[2] I do not say "the undenied."

[3] An objection is possible that "Johan" is monosyllabic, as it no doubt is earlier. But Bale was very likely to have "Jo-han-nes" in his head, and after examination of every place in the play where "Johan" and "John" (which is also used) appear, I think he *generally* (not perhaps universally) meant the dissyllable when he used it. It should be added that *these* twelves do *not* suggest, as do some, an anapæstic norm.

that it is only the prevailing prosodic anarchy which makes the actual utterance so stumbling and hobbling. What is really curious, and what shows that the Alexandrine was sounding in the man's ear, though he could not get it to run fluently from his tongue or pen, is that, with all his hobbling and stumbling, he scarcely ever slips into a real and unmistakable fourteener.

St. Mary Magdalene, etc.

Bale, however, is rather too late (for though the date of *King Johan* is not known, it cannot be much earlier than mid-century) to begin this chapter, and we must return. The Interludes, and those Moralities which may be said to fill the gap between the Interlude and the Mystery, are obligingly transitional in their prosody as in other things. The really great play of *St. Mary Magdalene*, which would almost of itself serve as drawbridge between the mediæval and the modern drama,[1] is mainly in alliterative lines which incline towards the later doggerel; while the *Castle of Perseverance* abides, as well as it can, by the elaborate stanzas of the mysteries themselves. Skelton "skeltonises" in long doggerel, not short, during most of his *Magnificence*. But these single examples of, in two out of the three cases, unknown authors, are less informative than the fairly numerous and various theatre of Heywood.[2] By comparing these we may find out almost enough about this peculiar dramatic doggerel, especially if we take in, as a further standard of comparison, the *February* of the *Shepherd's Kalendar* on one side, and the well-known *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle* on the other. The parent and original of the whole is beyond question the iambic octosyllable, which appears in a comparatively (only comparatively) pure state in Heywood's best-known piece, the

Heywood, etc.

[1] With *King Johan* it makes a link which I defy the most ingenious engineer to break down, though some strangely fail to see its strength, and others perhaps are not in case to see it. This play, interesting for many more reasons than those that directly concern us, is in Dr. Furnivall's *Digby Plays* (New Shakespeare Soc. 1882, E.E.T.S. 1896).

[2] The discredit of there being no complete edition of Heywood is now being removed by Mr. Farmer's, vol. i. of which has appeared. The *Four P's* is in Dodsley, and Mr. Fairholt's *Wit and Folly* (Percy Society, 1846) contains extracts from others.

Four P's. This extends itself in the first place, by the ordinary principle of trisyllabic equivalence, to eleven or even twelve syllables, as in *February*, which in their turn not infrequently fall into something like more or less irregular decasyllables or Alexandrines ; and of this happy-go-lucky kind the staple of Heywood's own pieces is constituted.[1]

Progress of the doggerel.

But as the practice of lawlessness becomes habitual, as the convenience of having a longer line in which to express the meaning makes itself felt, and perhaps as the actual comic effect of "patter," or the huddling of many syllables together round the main pivots of the verse, is felt likewise, this patter becomes more and more prevalent. And at last, where the other desire for some sort of regular recurrence has not induced a more or

[1] Examples of Heywood's metres :—
(1) Octosyllabic principally—

> And I to every soul again
> Did give a beck them to retain,
> And axèd them this question than,
> If that the soul of such a womàn
> Did late among them there appear?
> *Four P's.*

But in close proximity such lines as

> But Lord! how low the Souls made curtesy,

and

> 'Christ, help,' quoth a soul that lay for his fees,

make their appearance.

(2) Hawesian or Barclayan decasyllables staggering into Alexandrine or anapæstic doggerel—

> How can he have pain by imagination,
> That lacketh all kinds of consideration?
> And in all senses is so insufficient
> That nought can he think in ought that may be meant
> By any means to devise any self thing,
> Nor devise in thing past, present, or coming?
> *Wit and Folly.*

(3) The same rather more doggerelised—

> I cannot tell you : one knave disdains another,
> Wherefore take ye the tone and I shall take the other.
> We shall bestow them there as is most convenient
> For such a couple. I trow they shall repent
> That ever they met in this church here.
> *Pardoner and Friar.*

The verse mostly ranges between these extremes, though sometimes it "tumbles" in almost unmistakable anapæsts.

less happy-go-lucky fourteener, the verse becomes patter almost pure and simple. That is to say, something like a four-space mould is retained, but the spaces are allowed to bulge or shrink in the most reckless fashion. And so again, in turn, from this weltering crowd of slovenly and down-at-heel doggerel, when something more precise and comely is demanded, the fourteener, the Alexandrine, the decasyllabic couplet, and the single decasyllable of blank verse emerge again, till after a time pure blank verse, with its soon proved supremacy of dramatic exposition, establishes itself as *the* dramatic vehicle, and regular anapæsts appear to take other duty.

Examples.

The doggerel itself, however, continues to prevail in the whole vague class of "Interludes," and in the interesting but extremely slippery, and chronologically as well as otherwise uncertain, division of pieces which represent the stage from Heywood to Marlowe. To take the order of Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, *The Four Elements*[1] exhibits the state of doggerel, if not in its greatest chaos, in a very characteristic variety. A careless (and even a not so very careless) reader might take the opening pages to be composed of rhyming heroics; and if he had the audacity which not seldom goes with carelessness, he might make some fight for his blunder. Yet the better opinion will probably be that it is a blunder. After a time the

The Four Elements.

[1] This, like some others, is fairly represented in Mr. A. W. Pollard's excellent *English Miracle Plays* (Oxford, 1890), which will serve as a useful companion to this chapter for those who have not Hazlitt's *Dodsley*. Here are a few specimen lines of its Protean pseudo-metre :—

(*Decasyllable by courtesy*)
Th'aboundant grace of the power divyne.
(*Fair Alexandrine*)
Preserve this audyence and cause them to inclyne.
(*Octosyllable*)
And give the absolucion.
(*Shortened six*)
This wyse him deprave.
(*Irregular fourteener*)
Then hold down thy head like a pretty man and take my blessing.

But pages of example would be necessary to give the full variety, which is the old mystery-variation *doggerelised*.

drift is rather towards an equally irregular octosyllable, arranged in couplet, in common measure, and almost how you please, there being not a few passable Romance sixes, some rough Alexandrines, and a few Skeltonics. In other words, the piece is metrically a sort of *satura*—an olio of rhythms and metres, devoid of any real norm, and chiefly intended to differentiate the medium from prose with the least trouble to the writer. It is hardly possible not to connect such a phenomenon in drama with that of the probably (or nearly contemporary) Skeltonic proper in non-dramatic verse. But to map out a complete schedule of metres for it, though it would cost nothing but time and paper, would not merely be μόχθος περισσός, but also what Prometheus couples with that phrase in the original.

Calisto and Melibœa.

Calisto and Melibœa teaches the same lesson, with the difference of there being less difference in the exemplification. The measure here is tolerably uniform throughout —that is to say, it hovers between ten and twelve syllables on the average. These, as it were, slip down a slope towards rhymes which are sometimes alternate, sometimes coupled, and sometimes disposed in the quintet or yet more irregular form so often mentioned. In fact most of the examples of this metre remind one (as do many other things in life and literature) of the old game—poetically denominated "Cockamaroo," and prosaically "German Billiards"—in which a marble runs down a slope beset with pins, and falls into a trench at the end, whence it is helped up again by a dead lift to run its course once more. Sometimes the run here is smoother, and sometimes rougher; but the determination, with whatever staggering and swivelling, towards the rhyme is the guiding spirit of all. In the best known,

Everyman, etc.

and perhaps the best of all, *Everyman*, there is once more a very large diversity of length of line. There is also here (as more or less in the others) a certain amount of assonance,[1] which may be accounted for rather as the result of inability to rhyme than as purposed. *Hick*

[1] "Swete" and "wepe"; "take" and "escape"; even "man" and "name."

Scorner and *The World and the Child* are very similar, but in *God's Purposes* Bale returns[1] to the longer and, in its irregularity, more regular measure which he had used in *King Johan*. In *Thersites*, instead of the extreme range of the *Everyman* group, there is an alternation between the middle-sized and the Skeltonic doggerel—a great part of it, as most readers must have noticed, being to all appearance directly modelled on *Elinour Rumming*.[2]

Others.

The *Interlude of Youth* is almost wholly in the short form, its longer and heavier companion, *Lusty Juventus*, partly in the short, partly in the long; while *Jack Juggler* is pretty uniformly middle-sized, as is *The Nice Wanton*. This last, however, has a lyrical epilogue, in quatrains consisting of a triplet and a refrain, which, though not strictly metrical, is musical enough. So, too, *Jacob and Esau* has a rhyme-royal prologue, in which it is not too fanciful to see a reminiscence of the old overtures to the Mysteries, and a body of rather longish doggerel—pretty regular in its length; while *The Disobedient Child*, that curious version of the "Prodigal Son," with quite a different ending, has a staple of the same, with a "Song" in fairly regular metre.

On the other hand, the *Marriage of Wit and Science*, though probably very much later than most of these, comes pat enough to them, because it shows both a change in the formation of the doggerel, now to fairly strict decasyllables and now to fourteeners, and a large amount of the older jingle still remaining. And from this on in all plays we meet—the *New Custom*, *Ralph Roister Doister*, *Gammer Gurton*, the *Trial of Treasure*, and *Like will to Like*—the same determination is evident, though

[1] Without prejudice to the possible reversal of the order.

[2] Thus we have in eight consecutive lines :—

> Where is Busyris that fed his horses
> Full lyke a tyraunt with dead men's corses?
> Come any of you bothe,
> And I make an othe
> That ere I eat any breade
> I will dryve a wayne,
> Yea, for need, twayne,
> Between your body and your head!

in several cases there is a hesitation between Alexandrine and fourteener as the final goal.[1]

And others again to Shakespeare.

This varying doggerel, with the occasional inbreak of decent fourteeners, reappears in *Damon and Pythias*, and in *Appius and Virginia*, with larger indrafts of rather stodgy lyric. *Cambyses* has more variety, and a great deal of it is in pedestrian ballad-metre, with the doggerel mostly in the comic interludes. This latter arrangement, with the reverse tendency to fourteener, appears in *The Conflict of Conscience*, while in the remarkable *Triumphs of Love and Fortune* the mixture is further complicated by the appearance of regular heroic and even blank verse. This dominates also the still more singular *Lords and Ladies of London* group, and, as is well known, makes a figure in the earlier plays of Shakespeare himself. We may therefore legitimately turn from the group where doggerel, whether on the rising or the falling hand, is the rule, to that where blank verse is mainly prominent, prefixing, however, some more observations on this doggerel group itself.

The metrical aspect of the doggerel group.

It would probably, or rather certainly, be unwise to attempt to reduce this too rigidly to scheme or schedule, to assign it whys and wherefores of absolute logicality. The dominant fact in its rise and progress is undoubtedly that disorganisation of prosody generally, during the

[1] Some specimen lines of doggerels in different lengths may be added :—
(1) With Alexandrine norm—

> Therefore see that all shine as bright as Saint George,
> Or as doth a key newly come from the smith's forge.
> *Ralph Roister Doister.*

(2) With fourteener ditto—

D. I know not what a devil thou meanest, thou bringest me mere in doubt.
H. Knowest not on what tom-tailor's man sits broaching through a clout?
Gammer Gurton's Needle.

It is curious how closely this unreverend metre sometimes comes to the heroic model of *Sigurd*.

(3) With decasyllabic ditto—

> He used to say that as servants are obedient,
> To their bodily masters being in subjection,
> Even so evil men that are not content
> Are subject and slave to their lust and affection,
> *The Trial of Treasure.*

where, once more, the norm may be shifted to the anapæst.

fifteenth century, which has been so much dwelt on. Next to this may be ranked the other fact, that the mediæval theatre had been, and the transition theatre was actually still more, a *popular* amusement, and that the high jinks and horseplay of the scenes found a perfectly congenial medium in doggerel of almost any kind. The intermixture of Romance sixes, and of the ballad-measure, testifies to that close connection of the drama with romance and ballad themselves which is observable in all literatures: while the appearance of fourteener and decasyllable is but the natural settling down and clarifying of such a turbid mixture. Perhaps not the least interesting phenomenon of the whole is the persistence of rhyme, in and through all the varieties (until a really vigorous and flexible blank verse renders it unnecessary), as time-beater, verse-marker, and general separator of poetry, however doggerel, from prose. If, as is probable, the audience demanded it, the author was probably not less glad to give it as something to "hold on by"—to hand himself on with from step to step in his progress of prosodic wobbling and staggering.[1]

The infancy of blank verse.

This natural craving of childhood in all kinds and forms —first, second, political, literary, and what not—the craving for "something to catch hold of," is equally noticeable in the rhymeless division, though it shows itself in a different way; and the inveteracy of the rhymester's clutch on his rhyme is paralleled by the blank-verser's fidelity to his ten syllables. We saw that this is observable in Surrey's first experiment; it was, in fact, inevitable that it should be so; but the tendency at first hardens rather than relaxes in the dramatic variety. It dominates *Gorboduc*; it is equally noticeable in the *Misfortunes of Arthur*; it shows itself in all the mixed experiments noticed above, and in others not yet particularised; and what is more, it is by no means discarded in the improvements, immense as they are, of the "University Wits." The majesty of Marlowe, the sweetness of Peele, the grace which Greene manages

[1] See Appendix III. for a discussion of the definition of "doggerel," and its separation from other kinds.

sometimes to give, are all achieved without, and therefore all limited by the want of, *enjambement* and equivalence. The gain in dignity, in finish, even in ease, is real and great; but it is accomplished within the line, and for the most part within the iambic foot. The marvellous mastery and variety with which Shakespeare was to conjure foot for foot, and manœuvre line into paragraph, is not for this chapter, will not be for this volume.

Gorboduc.

In *Gorboduc* (*seu* "Ferrex and Porrex," *libentius audit*) the "paviour's sigh" is too peculiar and too obvious to have escaped or to escape any attentive reader. It was not improbably increased by a desire on the part of the authors to rise to the height of Seneca his style,—a style in itself remarkably sententious, and tending to preserve the stopped character of Greek *stichomythia*, even in speeches of the great length to which this mysterious and powerful dramatist is so prone. But I do not think there can be much doubt that the other causes glanced at just above, and earlier in the case of Surrey, were at work. There is in this respect little or no difference between those parts of the play attributed to Sackville and those handed over to Norton—if indeed there is any real ground for a strict separation—and the choruses, in six-lined stanzas of the *ababcc* form, are as stiff[1] as (what can hardly be called) the dialogue.[2] So wooden is the motion of the verse that even where (as sometimes, though comparatively seldom, happens) there is no actual stop at the end of the line, the voice and even the eye are not raised to "carry over," but sink to make a fresh start at the beginning of the next.

[1] *E.g.*—

When youth, not bridled with a guiding stay,
  Is left to random of their own delight,
And wields whole realms by force of sovereign sway,
  Great is the danger of unmaster'd might,
Lest skilless rage throw down with headlong fall
Their lands, their states, their lives, themselves and all.

[2] *E.g.*—

Yield not, O king, so much to weak despair,
Your sons yet live, and long I trust they shall.
If fates had taken you from earthly life
Before beginning of this civil strife,
  Etc.

The rhyme here is not unique, but its occurrence is evidently accidental.

When we remember how positively lively, for all its unkemptness, was the mishmash of doggerel and other metres which played the part of rival, it is scarcely wonderful that blank verse took a good twenty years really to establish itself, and even then seems to have been regarded with scant affection by some of its own practitioners.

Contrast of potentiality and later achievement.

We must not, however, stint it of its due sizings. Stiff, monotonous, dreary as it may be, it has at any rate the first law of prosody—Order—in it, while its rival is more or less pure anarchy. From the graceless muddle of this rival there could at most be got a very excellent medium for burlesque and farce ; refined comedy, passionate drama, lofty tragedy were alike impossible in it. In blank verse, as we know now, and as might perhaps have been known beforehand, all these things were possible. For its merit was the chief and principal thing, an essential quality. Its defects were mere accidents, easily removable by practice and experiment: and that practice and experiment actually developed merits and charms which are hardly to be excelled by the best rhymed verse, and which appear to have a sort of pre-established harmony with the genius of the English language and the English character. In the variation of the pause ; in the alternative flux and station of the lines ; in the construction by these means of the verse-paragraph ; and, above all, in the opportunity for almost infinite craftsmanship by means of trisyllabic equivalence, the claims of Order and Liberty are jointly met as in no other metrical form is even possible. While, in some instances, the subtle harmony achieved actually produces something very like the full stanza-effect, as for instance in the beginning of Tennyson's *Tithonus*, where it is with a sort of surprise that one finds, at the end of the first few lines, that there has not been a rhyme-band at all.

The *Misfortunes of Arthur*.

All this, however, might have seemed far enough off in *Gorboduc*, and it could hardly have seemed very much nearer in the *Misfortunes of Arthur*, where the general stump of the verse is almost as painfully audible as in

Gorboduc itself, and where there is the same tendency to immensely long *tirades*[1] not excusable as soliloquies. These are, however, here varied by a certain amount of broken dialogue-verse,[2] a door of escape through which lies the way to the breaking up of the verse generally, whether antiphonal or continuously uttered; and by quasi-lyric choruses. But as in these two plays, so in the blank verse parts of the mixed examples enumerated above and others, the want of ease, the terror of losing the mould, the ignorance of deliberate line-overlapping, and of substitution within the line, are still disastrously noticeable.

The Marlowe group.

But the blank verse of the "Wits" themselves is, quite independently of its superior poetical quality, an advance of the most interesting kind upon this earlier stage. Indeed, it is one of the best illustrations of that peculiarly *biological* character, that quality of life and growth, where the very sports and monstrosities have their connection and explanation, which makes the study of prosody so infinitely fascinating. It does not by any means escape at once—or ever—from the limitations of its forerunner; indeed, considering that full twenty years certainly elapsed between the appearance of *Gorboduc* and the appearance of *Tamburlaine*, the advance may seem uncommonly tardy. In the whole set, from Marlowe himself and Peele down to Nash, through Greene and Kyd and Lodge, the heavy driving of the chariot remains; and it is only occasionally, though at not so very infrequent occasions, that the weight is excused by the accompanying might and majesty. But it *is* so excused; and there is the difference. Even Sackville, who could manage the rhyme-royal decasyllable so admirably, is a failure with the blank verse

[1] The Nuntius in Act iv. speaks six pages in two speeches.

[2] *Cader.* Put case you win, what grief?
Arth. Admit I do.
What joy?
Cad. Then may you rule.
Arth. When I may die.
Cad. To rule is much.
Arth. Small if we covet naught.

And so on for some score or more of speechlets. The *Misfortunes*, moreover, if actual punctuation marks at the end of the line are to be taken as criterion, has slightly the advantage of *Gorboduc*.

one; he never achieves either sweetness or magnificence with it. It would be idle to waste time and space here (though a few specimens may be given or referred to in text and notes) by dwelling at length on the fashion in which Peele frequently secures the one and Marlowe seldom misses the other for long together, in which even Greene can sometimes achieve both, in which Kyd can arouse terror, if not pity.[1]

And yet they all remain cramped within their self-decreed prison of the line, and all wear the fetters (with the key so ostentatiously in them) of the dissyllabic foot. Take

[1] Fragments of verse from *Gorboduc*, the *Misfortunes*, Peele, Greene, and Marlowe :—

Your wonted true regard of faithful hearts
Makes me, O king, the bolder to resume,
To speak what I conceive within my breast :
Although the same do not agree at all
With that which other here my lords have said,
Nor which yourself have seemèd best to like.
Gorboduc.

What ! shall I stand whiles Arthur sheds my blood ?
And must I yield my neck unto the axe ?
Whom fates constrain, let him forego his bliss.
But he that needless yields unto his bane
When he may shun, does well deserve to lose
The good he cannot use. Who would sustain
A baser life that may maintain the best ?
Misfortunes of Arthur.

Were every ship ten thousand on the seas,
Manned with the strength of all the eastern kings,
Conveying all the monarchs of the world,
To invade the island where her Highness reigns—
'Twere all in vain : for heavens and destinies
Attend and wait upon her Majesty !
Battle of Alcazar.

Why thinks King Henry's son that Margaret's love
Hangs in the uncertain balance of proud time ?
That death shall make a discord of our thoughts ?
No ! stab the earl : and ere the morning sun
Shall vaunt him thrice over the lofty east,
Margaret will meet her Lacy in the heavens !
F. Bacon and F. Bungay.

Black is the beauty of the brightest day !
The golden ball of Heaven's eternal fire
That danced with glory on the silver waves,
Now wants the glory that inflamed his beams :
And all for faintness and for foul disgrace,
He binds his temples with a frowning cloud,
Ready to darken earth with endless night.
Tamburlaine.

the best-known and the finest passages of all—for thanks to the taste of the first rediscoverers of these men, especially Lamb, the best-known passages *are* really the finest—and the truth of this will become evident. Take "If all the pens," or "Oh thou art fairer," or "Is this the face" from Marlowe; take the parallel nectarisms of Peele from the *Arraignment of Paris* to *David and Bethsabe*,[1] and you will still find these two limitations. They are not felt as limitations, because the presence in the narrow room is so majestic, because the attitude under the fetters is so graceful; but they are there. Take a much less known passage from the Prologue to the *Arraignment*—

> The unpartial Daughters of Necessity
> Bin aiders in her suit.

In this fine sesquiline the sense *does* run on grammatically, and the suppression of the pause in the first line is so well adjusted to that overrunning that it makes a sort of verse-paragraph insinuation. But not to mention that "the" is elided in the original, the splendid first line is metrically self-contained. You make the usual breath-halt and fresh inspiration at the end of it.

And so always. Every now and then, by the grace of the dictionary, or the chance of refusing this elision, we get a real trisyllabic foot, from words like "wandering," "Margaret," and then the full beauty of which the verse is capable breaks from the cloud for a moment. Sometimes, as in the stately boast of the Fair Maid of Fressingfield, quoted overleaf, as in not a few of Marlowe's and of Peele's, the massive Cyclopean construction of the verse seems almost to dispense with mortar and with mortice—to make the whole by mere blending of importance and proportion in the parts, and cheat, as it were, the temptation to attend to these parts only or mainly. But it is hardly too much to say that in the other respect, that is to say, in respect of true overlapping

[1] *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* is in pure fourteeners, and perhaps that is the main reason why some have denied to Peele our one play directly representative of the Romance proper.

and carrying on of the music, the absence is total. It was Shakespeare, Shakespeare only, and Shakespeare himself not at first nor till after long, who thawed the ice, broke the bonds, and set the music finally in unhampered motion.[1]

[1] In dealing with his beginnings in the next volume we shall have again to take up the procedure of these his masters—so that there is no real injustice in giving them no large space here. There, too, will be the place to deal with some interesting special phenomena, such as the very remarkable rehandling, from rhyme to blank, of *Tancred and Gismund*. Here, and in the Interchapter following, we are concerned almost wholly with the retrospective and contemporary connection of blank verse with doggerel.

CHAPTER V

SPENSER

His position, looking before and after—The *Shepherd's Kalendar*—The "February" metre—The others—Other poems—*Mother Hubbard's Tale*—Spenser as a sonneteer—The *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*—The *Faerie Queene*, and its stanza—A true prosodic entity—The diction—Capacities of the stanza, internal and co-operative.

His position, looking before and after.

IN the poet of the *Faerie Queene* we come once more to a focus of prosodic investigation and history. But there is this striking difference between Spenser and Chaucer, that the younger poet was not fated to have his work disturbed, and rendered in some sense a curiosity merely, by any cataclysmic change of pronunciation or of orthography. Changes there have been, of course, since Spenser's time. The accent of some words, which was floating in his day, has been definitely settled, and that of others has undergone an actual alteration. Grammatical rules have established themselves, for better, for worse. Altered pronunciation has affected rhyme. Some words have become obsolete beyond recall except as deliberate archaisms, others are waiting for poets to reinstate them in usage, while enormous additions have been made to the vocabulary. But these things are all trivial compared with the gaps which separate Spenser himself, and much more ourselves, from Chaucer. There is in the first front of the problem the all-important factor of the final *e*—of itself bringing about, by its disappearance, a revaluation and redistribution of the centre of gravity of the language. There are numerous smaller

5206.

differences of the same kind, and tending in the same direction. Above all, there is the approach at least to a settlement of the pronunciation, as compared with the obvious wobble and welter of the fifteenth century. Anyhow, prosody as it leaves Spenser's hands, and prosody as it comes into them, are two things more different from each other than even prosody as it comes into Chaucer's hands, and prosody as it leaves them. The poet of the *Canterbury Tales* sums up everything that is good in his predecessors, adds much, does what can be done, and what no one but himself could do, for the present; but rather completes the past than begins the future. The poet of the *Faerie Queene* does just the contrary. From his immediate predecessors he takes hardly anything, and though he takes (with full acknowledgment) much from Chaucer himself, he handles it quite independently. He experiments largely. And the result is that, assisted by the Time-Spirit, he leaves his successors something that they can use, and they use it even unto this day.

Of his *péchés de jeunesse* in the direction of classical metres we have spoken, and need not speak again till we come to deal with his prosodic criticism. Not the most elaborate and explicit palinode could be more eloquent or more decisive than the fact that nothing of his poetical manhood's work is "versed" but all "rhymed." And it is quite unnecessary (though at the same time quite permissible) to take in the rhyming of the mysterious unrhymed, though not "versed" contributions, to the *Theatre of Voluptuous Worldlings*[1] as an additional proof of his repentance. Spenser the Poet—Spenser from the *Shepherd's Kalendar* to the *Cantos of Mutability*—is staunch to true English prosody in measure and rhyme; he is in fact the Joshua, even more than Chaucer is the Moses, of its journey to the Promised Land.

[1] It may be well to remind the reader that in the year in which Spenser entered Pembroke Hall (1569), at the age of 17 or so, there appeared a book with a long title, usually shortened as above, signed by John Van der Noodt, and containing, among other things, certain *Visions* of Petrarch and Du Bellay, the latter in blank verse quatorzains. Twenty-two years later, in 1591, Spenser's own *Complaints* contained these very pieces, rehandled into rhymed sonnets, but unmistakably the same.

The *Shepherd's Kalendar.*

The *Kalendar* itself, if not poetically the most delightful, is also not prosodically the least interesting of this glorious body of work, the special paradise and pleasure-dome of all true lovers of English poetry. It is a sort of exercising-ground for the paradise itself; there is much experiment in it, and the experiments, though there is hardly one of them which we had rather were away, are not always such as we vehemently desire to be imitated. But in the least good of them the "new poet," as Webbe calls him, appears; one of them is one of the great *jalons* or milestones of the history of English prosody itself; and in every one we find the presence of that poetic spirit and power which turns metre from a mere strung handful of clay beads into a covey of singing birds. It was not for nothing, doubtless, that he possessed at once the language of the court and capital, that of the schools and the library, and that of a district (Lancashire) where dialect still prevailed, and where the older fashions of measure had held their ground. It was not for nothing that he had been early troubled, if only idly and on the wrong side, about his prosodic soul. But the heart of it and the beauty of it was that he was a poet, and a great poet, and could not but make poetic whatsoever he touched.

There is no particular interest in the selection of the metre of "January," which is one often used by Spenser's predecessors (especially his immediate predecessors), the decasyllabic sixain rhymed *ababcc*. But the management in it is distinctly superior [1]; and though the metre itself is not one of the best—far inferior to rhyme-royal, and not the equal of the more difficult and uncommon quintet—it has a position of special importance in the prominence given by it to the final couplet, which is more independent of the body of the verse than in rhyme-royal, and so, as afterwards in Fairfax's octaves, leads to the

[1] Thou barraine ground, whom winter's wrath hath wasted,
Art made a mirror to behold my plight:
Whilome thy fresh spring flow'r'd, and after hasted
Thy sommer prowde, with daffadillies dight;
And now is come thy winter's stormie state,
Thy mantle mar'd wherin thou maskedst late.

continuous separated couplet itself. It is also of no small importance—an importance of a double-edged kind—that the last line of all—

Whose hanging heads did seem his careful case to weep—

is an Alexandrine.

The "February" metre.

Far different is it with the February piece, "The Oak and the Brere." Here the northern element in Spenser comes in, for it is this element, with hardly a doubt, that makes the poem a link between *Genesis and Exodus*, more than three hundred years earlier, and *Christabel*, more than two hundred years later. Its base is a four-foot (or "four-accent") line, which is capable of being reduced without injury to its norm of eight syllables, and of being extended, also without injury, to twelve, anapæsts being by equivalence substituted for iambs. So that we have in one place an octosyllable—

For it had been an ancient tree—

of the purest iambic water, save for the *i* in "ancient"; in another, a hendecasyllable—

With flowering blossoms to furnish the prime—

where all the feet but one are anapæstic.

Spenser nowhere (except in "May" and "September" of the same work)[1] repeated this experiment; if he had

[1] And these, especially "September," have the air rather of intermixtures of intentionally different metres than of one metre intentionally modulated in variation. The thing, I should say, was floating in Spenser's imagination, rather than fixed in his intellect. And it is quite competent, for those who wish to do so, to urge that short doggerel, like the piece quoted from Heywood above, ought to be let into the succession, and may have directly suggested the thing itself to our poet, as being recent after a fashion, and probably popular. At any rate it may be well to give a little block of "February" itself for illustration and comparison with older and younger examples:—

The axe's edge did oft turne again
As halfe unwilling to cut the graine.
Seemed the senselesse yron did feare,
Or to wrong holy eld did forbeare—
For it had been an ancient tree,
Sacred with many a mysterie,

done so, there is little doubt that he would have improved upon it, interesting as it is. He would have seen that a greater admixture of short iambic lines than he has given is desirable (it is curious that Coleridge himself, possibly from Spenser's example, fell into the same mistake at first), that the base of the measure should be iambic, and the anapæsts thrown in only for increased speed, throb, and variety. But as it was, he did it and left it—for a time to be neglected, in good time to be recovered and followed.

The others.

What makes it more interesting still is that this principle of equivalence—which some have strangely called a "fiction," and which, as a fact, is a fact of seven hundred years' duration—reappears in "March," though perhaps less happily. Spenser has here applied it, and the equally old principle of feminine or double rhyme, to the Romance six. Sometimes he is as correct to the metre as the author of *Sir Thopas* himself. But he generally (as he may even here have meant to do) makes the six a seven; and both in sixes and (once or twice) eights he allows himself frequent resolution and equivalence. The result[1] is not, I think, a great success, but it illustrates the eagerness with which "the new poet" was experimenting, and it shows the powers which he was bringing to bear upon his experiments.

"April" is more complicated, and is, metrically speaking,

And often crost with the priestes crew
And often hallowed with holy water dew
But sike fancies weren foolerie
And broughten the Oake to his miserie.

The mixture of metres (for even the pure decasyllable emerges) is not less interesting than the mixture of Spenser's poetry and his puritanism, and the whole should be contrasted with the perfectly regular and extremely pretty iambic triplets of the *Dedication*, "Go, little book," etc.

[1] *E.g.* —

(6) But is abroad at his game.
(6) With wings of purple and blue.
(8) That I chanced to fall asleep with sorrow.

(Some would say, of course, that "at 's game," "purpl' and" are intended; to which there is the old reply, "Granted, as *possible*; but these elisions are ready for any one who chooses to *un*elide them.")

far more successful. After an overture of decasyllabic quatrains with alternate rhymes, it breaks into a beautiful lyrical measure (profaned by the awkward admiration of Webbe), a *neuvain*[1] of ten, four, ten, four, two tens, two fours, and an eight, rhymed *ababccddc*, with a short coda of quatrains to finish. The effect (like that of most formal Elizabethan lyrics outside the actual song-books) is rather stately than easy in its grace. But it is admirably graceful; and its very stateliness has got rid of the buckram which had so long pressed and compressed formal lyric in English.

"May" has resemblance to "February," though the base is still more constantly anapæstic, and it is therefore less interesting; while there is a further tendency (noticeable also, but less, in "February" itself) to slip into actual decasyllables, more or less normal. "June" is in octaves, chiefly attractive because they only want the added Alexandrine and the varied rhyme of 1 and 3, 5 and 7, to become the great Spenserian itself.

It is probable that most modern readers will think "July" a considerable falling off. It is in the divided fourteener or common measure, a form which, as we have seen—though reinstated in poetical position during the third quarter of the century—had also been made terribly liable to jog-trot and sing-song. The astonishing "soar" which Jonson or Donne was shortly to give it, and which it was to retain for the best part of two generations, was yet unthought of; and it is quite possible that Spenser *meant* to make it uncouth and rustical. At any rate he

[1] Ye dainty nymphs that in this blessed brook
Do bathe your breast,
Forsake your wat'ry bowers and thither look,
At my request;
And eke you virgins that on Parnass dwell
Whence floweth Helicon the learned well;
Help me to blaze,
Her worthy praise,
Which in her sex doth all excell.

(The fours constantly become fives by an anapæst, "Such a bellibone," etc. Some would have this trochaic, which seems to me far less probable.)

has done so.[1] Neither is there anything great for us in "August," which begins in the sixain of "January," split up for conversation—an operation which it does not bear very happily.[2] But we must always remember that the book is a book of experiments, and that experiments that come wrong are the most valuable things next to experiments that come right, because they serve as warnings to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Neither is this by any means the only metrical attempt of the poem. It has at the end six *continuous* sixains, which *may* attempt the Italian *sestina*; and it also contains a most curious sort of roundelay, sung antiphonally in single lines, one of the singers at his choice merely echoing the other in a sort of refrain, or sometimes making substantive contributions. The metre of this (which made Guest very angry)[3] has the iambic octosyllable for base, but admits of large shortenings and variations of a broken character, occasionally inclining to the hypercatalectic. "September" is to "May" very much what "May" is to "February," being still anapæstic, but now anapæstic in obvious and

[1] Is not thilke same a goteheard prowde
That sits on yonder bancke,
Whose straying heard them safe doth shrowde
Emong the bushes rancke?

(I purposely vary the spelling of these citations from Spenser to mark his Janus-position, and for other reasons. After this volume all spelling will be modernised, as, until the present Book, almost all has been exactly kept.)

[2] *Willie.* Mischiefe * mought to that mischaunce befall
That so hath raft us of our meriment!
But rede me what payne doth thee so appall;
Or lovest thou, or been thy younglinges miswent?
Perigot. Love has misled both my younglinges and mee,
I pyne for payne, and they my payne to see.

[3] *English Rhythms*, ed. Skeat, p. 78: "barbarous," he says, and "exploded" of this (cf. App. V., "Feet").

Per. All as the sunny beam so bright,
Wil. Hey! ho! the sun beam!
Per. Glanceth from Phœbus face forthright,
Wil. So love into thy heart did stream;
Per. Or as Dame Cynthia's silver ray,
Wil. Hey! ho! the moon-light.
Etc. etc.

* The *e* valued?

systematic intention, or else octosyllabic and decasyllabic almost as obviously.

"October" is in decasyllables rhymed in sixains, *abbaba*, but "November" rises higher. Beginning with interlaced decasyllables after the fashion of Wyatt, which shape themselves, if anybody pleases, in the Chaucerian octave or *body* of the Spenserian stanza itself, it breaks into a splendid lyrical stanza[1] with refrain; the structure of the stanza varies a little, but the norm is 12,10,10,10,10,8,8,4,10,4, *ababbccdbd*, the fours being always alternately—

O heavie herse!

and

O carefull verse!

The irregularity is chiefly in the octosyllabic couplets, which are sometimes extended into tens and sometimes contracted to sixes, perhaps not quite deliberately, while the first twelves themselves are sometimes tens. "December" ends as "January" had begun with the sixain, and there is an Alexandrine colophon, or coda.

"November," with the "dainty nymphs" of "April," gives the most beautiful metrical result of the *Kalendar*, as the *Christabel* metre of "February" gives the most historically interesting and momentous; but it cannot be too often repeated that the whole book is a diploma-piece of the highest possible value. It shows, not as Sackville's *Induction* had shown, mastery in one particular kind which had been long practised, but mastery (with perhaps only one, and that an explicable exception) in every metre that the poet chose to take up. This variety and certainty of quill—this unerringness in a country which had proved

[1] Whence is it that the flowret of the field doth fade,
And lyeth buried long in Winter's bale,
Yet, soone as Spring his mantle hath displayde
It flowreth fresh as it should never fayle?
But thing on earth that is of most avayle,
As virtue's branch and beautie's budde,
Reliven not for any good.
O heavie herse!
The braunch once dead, the budde eke needes must quaile.
O carefull verse!

itself a mere maze for more than a century—is the great point of importance.

Other poems. *Mother Hubbard's Tale.*

The rest of Spenser's Minor Poems (which would have been major for any other poet) entirely confirm the testimony of this prerogative instance. The octaves of *Muiopotmos*, the rhymes-royal, single and sonnet-coupled, of the *Ruines of Time*, the sixains of the *Tears of the Muses*, and the octaves again of *Virgil's Gnat* show the mastery equally and increasingly, if not in new forms. The octaves in actual *ottava* (*abababcc*) of *Muiopotmos* and the kindred *Gnat* have seemed peculiarly interesting to some, partly because Spenser disowned the form when he began to build that loftiest of rhymes which derives its name from him, and partly as evidences of what he could do with it. To me this metre has, *in English*, never much appealed save for serio-comic purposes—it is the vale between the hills of the rhyme-royal and the Spenserian itself; but perhaps a specimen may be given below.[1] But with *Mother Hubberd's Tale* it is different. Here[2] Spenser tries (for the first and only time on any considerable scale) the continuous couplet, the "riding rhyme," and again acquits himself in it like a master. Every competent student of prosody must recognise the way in which he develops both sides of his own master's teaching, and especially that of stopped, sharply divided, antithetic couplet. We know that as a matter of fact the couplet writers of the earlier seventeenth century took this from

[1] Now more and more having himself enrolled,
His glittering breast he lifteth up on hie,
And with proud vaunt his head aloft did hold;
His crest above, spotted with purple dye
On every side, did shine like scaly gold;
And his bright eyes glauncing full dreadfully
Did seem to flame out flakes of flashing fire
And with sterne looks to threaten kindled ire.

[2] I cannot, my lief brother, like but well
The purpose of the compact which ye tell;
For well I wot (compar'd to all the rest
Of each degree) that Begger's life is best;
And they that thinke themselves the best of all,
Oft times to begging are content to fall.

(The famous picture of Court, and the "Hell of Sueing," ought to be too well known to quote.)

Fairfax ; but they might have taken it from Spenser. In *Colin Clout's Come Home Again* he reverts to the inter-mixed rhymes of the Wyatt model—a mistake, perhaps, but one which helps equally well to show his command of the line as opposed to the couplet, and which after a time settles to the regular alternate-rhymed quatrain—a far better thing. The magnificent[1] rhyme-royal of the *Four Hymns*, though his greatest accomplishment in this metre, and the greatest thing in it among original examples, with Chaucer's and Sackville's, provides us with no exact novelty, and the septets, without final rhyme, of *Daphnaida*, though newer, are not quite so happy. But the various poems in sonnet form, and the strophes of the *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*, require fuller treatment.

Spenser as a sonneteer.

The advantage obtained, in the study of Spenser's sonnet-manufacture, by comparing the *Visions of Bellay* of 1569 with those of 1591 is so great, and the objections to the proceeding are of such slight weight,[2] that it may be unhesitatingly indulged in. The version of the *Theatre of Voluptuous Worldlings* has a double chrono-

[1] I never like to use this word without a justification :—

> And that faire lampe which useth to inflame
> The hearts of men with selfe-consuming fyre
> Thenceforth seems fowle, and full of sinfull blame ;
> And all that pompe to which proud minds aspyre
> By name of Honour, and so much desyre,
> Seems to them basenesse, and all riches drosse,
> And all mirth sadnesse, and all lucre losse.

Here is the magician ! The other or *Daphnaida* form should perhaps also be illustrated :—

> She is the rose, the glory of the day ;
> And mine, the primrose in the lowly shade—
> Mine ? ah ! not mine ; amisse I mine did say.
> Not mine, but his which mine awhile her made ;
> Mine to be his, with him to live for ay.
> Oh ! that so fair a flower so soon should fade
> And through untimely tempest fall away !

Pretty as this is, it seems to me to have a somewhat unfinished effect as compared with rhyme-royal, and still more with the various octaves and the Spenserian. You feel inclined to say, *Avec ça ?*

[2] The Dutchman says, "*I* have translated them." To which it may be answered : "Aiblins he was a leear." Or perhaps he went on the principle *qui facit per alium*. Or half-a-dozen other perhapses of no importance.

logical interest. If it is Spenser's, it is not only his earliest known work, but the work of a boy of about seventeen, written perhaps before he left school; and whether it is Spenser's or another's, it displays, in the most interesting fashion in the world, at once something of the prosodic weaknesses of the time, and something more of an extraordinary superiority to them. The translator has adopted the sonnet number of lines and the regular decasyllable; but except in one or two perfect cases, and one or two more imperfect, he has professed his inability to rhyme in *any* sonnet scheme by avoiding rhyme altogether. The *faire* of his verse itself has some of the weakness of the Surrey-Sackville blank in such cadences as

> Sweetly sliding into the eyes of men ;

but this shortcoming is much rarer than in its models. There is also something, in its line-connection and disconnection, of the breathlessness, the sort of gasp and stump with which, as has been said, a paviour lifts and sets down his rammer. But there is much less of all this than we should expect. Accordingly, when the poet comes, twenty years later, to publish the same matter in perfected sonnet-form, his by this time practised skill has surprisingly little to do.[1] The blank-verse quatorzains of 1569 become the finished sonnets of 1591 with the least change possible, with the smallest substitution, sometimes a mere shifting, of words, and with very little

[1] 1569.

It was the time when rest, the gift of gods
Sweetly sliding into the eyes of men,
Doth drowne in the forgetfulness of sleep
The carefull travels of the painefull day,
Then did a ghost appear before mine eyes
On that great river's bank that runs by Rome.

1591.

It was the time when rest, soft-sliding downe
From heaven's height into men's heavy eyes,
In the forgetfulness of sleep doth drowne
The careful thoughts of mortal miseries.
Then did a ghost before mine eyes appear,
On that great river's bank that runs by Rome.

smoothing and shaping of metre for rhyme. The one is almost a natural stage of the other; we can almost conceive the poet executing the processes on purpose, and making rough drafts in blank verse of the future fair ones in rhyme.

The finished sonnets themselves, of which the *Amoretti* are so much the most perfect examples that we may confine our remarks to them, have on the whole received insufficient justice. Wordsworth's reference[1] to them, in his famous sonnet-history of the sonnet, is a little patronising, and even suggests them as a sort of anti-climax to the *Faerie Queene*. They are, of course, inferior in passion and intensity to Shakespeare's, and to Drayton's enigmatic masterpiece; in variety and in charm to Sidney's; in vigour to Milton's. They Petrarchise in a way and to a degree which an obedient world, having been told that to Petrarchise is to be frigid, thinks to involve frigidity. They have the imitative character which has always been known by students to belong to the Elizabethan sonnet, if not to the sonnet generally, and which Mr. Sidney Lee has established once for all by chapter and verse.[2] But in mass, in real if not pretentious variety, and in thoroughness of craftsmanship, they have few if any superiors, and at the time when they were probably written they are likely to have stood alone for combination of colour and cadence with prosodic perfection.[3]

[1] A glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faeryland
To struggle through dark ways.

[2] In the two volumes of his rearrangement of Mr. Arber's *English Garner*, *Elizabethan Sonnets* (London, 1904).

[3] They follow, of course, the true English form with final couplet, though they interlink the earlier rhymes. An example may be desirable. Perhaps there is nothing better for prosodic purposes than that old favourite, the concluding piece—

Like as the culver on the barèd bough,
Sits mourning for the absence of her mate,
And in her songs sends many a wishful vow
For his return that seemes to linger late;
So I alone, now left disconsolate,
Mourne to myself the absence of my love,
And wandering here and there all desolate
Seek with my plaints to match that mournful dove.

The *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*.

Still more alone, and still more unmistakably, stand the *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*, the first of the great English odes, and to this day two of the greatest experiments in that regularly or irregularly strophied arrangement which numbers among its triumphs the achievements of Milton and Dryden, of Gray and Collins, of Keats and Wordsworth, of Tennyson, and Arnold, and Mr. Swinburne. The first, written for others, may lack that mastered but not tamed fury of personal passion which the *Epithalamion* possesses, but it has an exquisite beauty of its own: and a very large part of that beauty is derived from the unerring modulation of the variously lengthened and shortened lines, and of the rhymes, now single, now double. That it is, up to its date in English, the most beautiful thing of its own prosodic kind I am quite certain. It is even more beautiful than the *Epithalamion* itself in the gravity and delicate management of the refrain; but in other respects the longer poem is the greater.[1]

No joy of ought that under Heaven doth hove
Can comfort me but her owne joyous sight,
Whose sweet aspect both God and man can move
In her unspotted pleasaunce to delight.
Dark is my day whyles her fair light I miss,
And dead my life, that wants such lively bliss.

[1] Both are such land- and sea-marks of the transformation which Spenser effected in our prosodic country that, well as they *ought* to be known, an example of each must be given :—

P. Ye gentle Birdes! the world's faire ornament,
And Heaven's glorie, whom this happie hower,
Doth leade unto your lovers' blisfull bower,
Joy may you have, and gentle hearts' content
Of your love's couplement;
And let faire Venus, that is Queene of Love,
With her heart-quelling sonne upon you smile,
Whose smile, they say, hath virtue to remove
All Love's dislike, and friendship's faultie guile
For ever to assoile.
Let endlesse Peace your steadfast hearts accord,
And blessed Plenty wait upon your bord;
And let your bed with pleasures chaste abound,
That fruitful issue may to you afford,
Which may your foes confound,
And make your joyes redound
Upon your Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

In all these poems we see the accomplished master, just as in the *Kalendar* we see the daring and predestined student, of prosodic reform. But of course it would be idle to attempt, in even the most distant fashion, to deprive the *Faerie Queene* of its place as the chief field, and the chief agent, of Spenser's influence and exploits in prosody. It is in the *Faerie Queene* that he shows himself greatest; it is through the *Faerie Queene* that he has affected not merely poet after poet, but generation after generation of those who love, though they cannot write, poetry. We may consider it prosodically in several different ways, taking first the stanza itself and its special prosodic-poetic effect, then the diction from the specially prosodic point of view, and then perhaps also the whole poetic effect of the poem as it depends upon prosodic means.

The *Faerie Queene*,

Inconsiderate and unintelligent statements are not rare on any subject, and perhaps least of all in relation to prosody. But the dismissal of the Spenserian stanza as ottava rima *plus* an Alexandrine is worse than inconsiderate and unintelligent. Taking "ottava" strictly, it is merely false; substituting "octave" it is in a certain

and its stanza.

E. Open the Temple gates unto my Love,
Open them wide that she may enter in,
And all the posts adorn as doth behove,
And all the pillours deck with girlands trim,
For to receive this Saynt with honour dew,
That commeth in to you.
With trembling steps, and humble reverence,
She commeth in, before th' Almighties view:
Of her, ye virgins, learne obedience,
When so ye come into those holy places,
To humble your proude faces:
Bring her up to th' High Altar, that she may
The sacred ceremonies there partake,
The which do endlesse matrimony make;
And let the roaring organs loudly play
The praises of the Lord in lively notes;
The whiles, with hollow throates,
The choristers the joyous antheme sing,
That all the woods may answer, and their echo ring!

It is not ill to remember in reading this that Barclay duly died in the year in which Spenser was born. But, if anybody pleases, he may also remember the Italian *canzone* and approximate the forms, as showing what the "Italian influence" (which writers like Barclay wanted) helped to do.

undeniable sense a true statement[1]: just as it would be true to say that Shakespeare was a specimen of the genus *homo* with a taller forehead than usual, or that Shelley's "O World! O Life! O Time!" is a poem containing so many letters arranged in so many lines. All these measurements are true; they are true in much the same sense; and they are pretty equally (let us say) not quite all the truth. Let us look at some of those parts of the truth which this particular statement does not contain.

A true prosodic entity.

In the first place it is at least something notable that though this "eight-line stanza of the Italians," as the belittlers call it, had been used in Italy and in other countries for hundreds of years, no soul had ever thought of making this trifling addition to it, or to any similar stanza. There are indeed one or two exceptions which are sometimes brought forward—one is Sir Thomas More's stanzas in rhyme-royal, with the seventh line lengthened, on the death of Elizabeth of York.[2] It is sufficient to remark in the first place that the lengthening of the last line of an existing stanza is a different thing from the addition of one to create a new; in the second, that the final lines are not *all* Alexandrines[3]; in the third, that it is impossible to imagine any two things much more different than this septet and the Spenserian *neuvain*.

[1] And some are disposed to question even this allowance. For while the octave of Ariosto and Tasso rhymes *abababcc*, and the first eight lines of the Spenserian rhyme *ababbcbc*—the difference being vital to the symphonic music, especially with the addition—Chaucer's octave, though usually in this latter form of rhyme, and very probably among the influences which suggested it to Spenser, goes sometimes also *ababbccb*. The allowance comes, in fact, to this, that $8+1=9$ whether you take it in verses, or whether you take it in fools' heads. And this, I say, *is* undeniable. But see App. p. 408.

[2] An extract from this is in Warton, ed. Hazlitt, iv. 90-91. Here is a stanza:—

> Where are our castels now, where are our towers?
> Goodly Rychemonde, sone art thou gone from me!
> At Westmynster that costly worke of yours,
> Myne owne dere lorde, now shall I never see!
> Almighty God vouchsafe to graunt that ye
> For you and your children well may edify,
> My palace byldyd is, and lo! now here I ly.

[3] Pray for my soul, for lo! now here I ly.

I could add many chance end-Alexandrines from Hawes, etc.

The other occurs in the famous *Princely Pleasures of Kenilworth* and is the work of Ferrers, who, as we noted in speaking of the *Mirror for Magistrates* which lies so heavy on his soul, seems to have had a fancy for Alexandrines. It, like More's, can have given nothing but a suggestion, and very likely did not give even that.[1] Almost the first thing that strikes one about the Spenserian is its singular homogeneity. Its unity is not merely structural, it is organic. The old fancy which has translated itself into the modern doctrine of "survival of the fittest"—the idea of an original creation of all sorts of creatures, some of which were no good and dropped off—suggests itself here at once as we compare Spenser's stanza with, let us say, those of the Fletchers, his pupils, or that of Prior, his well-intentioned would-be improver. All the three were poets, in their different ways, far above the average; and the Fletchers at least have produced many beautiful stanzas. But the beauty is not due to the stanza, it comes in spite thereof. Theirs are made, Spenser's grow; and their beauty, and the pleasure that they give, grow with them. It has always been observed by competent critics as a proof of the "trueness," the reality, the genuine entity and quintessentiality of the Spenserian, that its effects practically reproduce themselves in the hands of poets of the most different tendencies and powers, though of course the excellence of the result depends upon the congeniality of the stanza and the poet. Shenstone and Thomson, Beattie and Scott, Byron and Shelley, Keats and Tennyson—here are most striking diversities of administration; but, as far as the stanza is concerned, it is the same spirit.

[1] The piece may be found in Hazlitt's *Gascoigne*, ii. 94-95—

> I am the Lady of the Pleasant Lake,
> Who since the time of good king Arthur's reign,
> That here with royal court abode did make,
> Have led a ling'ring life in restless pain,
> Till now that this your third arrival here
> *Doth cause me come abroad and boldly thus appeare.*

This *is* (though recurring) like the odd Alexandrine at the end of "January": it is *not* like the "crown-imperial" of the main Spenserian garden.

The diction.

That this spirit does not depend wholly, or to any overbalancing degree, on the Spenserian *diction* is shown by this very comparison, for *Adonais* and the *Lotos Eaters*, the greatest triumphs of the stanza, except the *Eve of St. Agnes*, later than the *Faerie Queene* itself, attempt no archaism, and the *Eve* itself not much, if any. But I am inclined, against Ben, to think that Spenser was justified of his rosin, that is to say his diction,[1] almost as much as of his fiddle, that is to say his stanza. A good deal of the strangeness in look of that diction is due to a theory that rhymes must be made to rhyme to the eye as well as to the ear; a good deal more is a merer matter of spelling even than in these cases. But, as has been pointed out above in the case of the *Kalendar*, a new poetic diction was wanted, and he made it. That he made it specially to suit the stanza itself, and that it does suit it supremely, I at least have no doubt; and to bring this out we may consider what are the specially poetic characteristics of the stanza itself and of its prosodic quintessence.

Capacities of the stanza, internal and co-operative.

Perhaps the most eminent and prominent of these is the extraordinary combination which it presents, of what we may call individual, and what we may call social, capacities and achievements. The danger of the stanza —and the source of the dislike for it of shrewd but prosaic critics—is its tendency to *isolation*, its apparent suitableness rather to lyric than to narrative. This is especially noticeable in the stanzas which close with a couplet; it constitutes a certain drawback both in rhyme-royal and in ottava,[2] and it is hardly less noticeable in the decasyllabic quatrain until some of its lines are shortened, as in Tennyson's *Palace* and *Dream*; or until a sort of outrigger of rhyme is projected, as in Mr. Swinburne's *Laus Veneris*. But the Spenserian has nothing of this. Despite its great bulk and the consequent facilities which

[1] He may have "writ no language" that had been used before, but he made one that has been used ever since.

[2] Italian itself does not quite escape this, but the point is out of our way, and I may be permitted to refer to my *Earlier Renaissance* (Edinburgh, 1901, p. 121 *sq.*) on the subject.

it offers for the vignetting of definite pictures and incidents within a single stanza, the long Alexandrine at the close seems to launch it on towards its successor *ripæ ulterioris amore*, or rather with the desire of fresh striking out in the unbroken though wave-swept sea of poetry. Each is a great stroke by a mighty swimmer: it furthers the progress for the next as well as in itself. And it is greatly in this that the *untiring* character of the *Faerie Queene* consists. I know of course that it has been the fashion to deny this quality. But I say boldly that anybody who finds the *Faerie Queene* wearisome either has not given it a fair trial, or was not in the vein when he tried (which is much the same thing), or else has no real and vital love for poetry as poetry—though what he will call "great thoughts," or interesting stories, or unessential points of one kind or another, may sometimes conciliate him thereto.

Of the qualities of the stanza itself there has only been, among its true lovers, that sort of debate which the true lovers of any beauty always maintain among themselves. But it is remarkable that all the charms and attractions assigned, and justly assigned, to it—the languorous (not languid) grace [1] of the movement, the extraordinary fluidity, the incomparably dreamlike atmosphere which it raises round itself and the reader, the dissolving panorama or pageant of figures and colours that the dream brings with it, the faint yet always audible accompaniment of music that matches and completes the magic offered to the eye—all these depend directly on the prosody, if they are not even very mainly caused by it. A false note, a jar, a heavy driving of the wheels, and the charm will be broken—as a very few instances (perhaps not one in a thousand of the forty thousand verses) warn us, though it is never more than warning, the slips being so few, so far between, and so slight when they occur. Otherwise the whole web is woven seamlessly and without break.

[1] It should perhaps be observed that it is quite a mistake to suppose that this grace excludes strength. Spenser is never violent, but he can only be thought to lack vigour by those who confuse it with violence.

The real (and yet so strangely missed !) unity of the story is great, but the unity of the prosodic texture and accompaniment is far greater.

And this marvel was achieved within the same century at the beginning of which, and long after the beginning of which, men of real talent and even of some poetic power were, if not exactly content, hopelessly, as it would seem, doomed, to stagger and stutter, to drop their stitches and flatten their notes, to grope and blunder like palsied folk in selecting the words for their feet, the feet for their lines, the lines for their stanzas, the stanzas for their poems. I am one of those who think that the *Pastime of Pleasure* really had some influence on the *Faerie Queene*, and I am not an undervaluer of Hawes. But only read the two from the prosodic standpoint, and you will see, unfailingly, the marvellous doings of the Lord of Poetry in the compass of a single lifetime.[1]

[1] If anything in these last pages seems hyperbolic, I can only say that fifty years' reading for pleasure, and (which may be more surprising) ten recent years of reading with students as one reads a Greek or Latin text, have not staled the charm of Spenser for me. But a few more precise notes, on the most strictly prosodic characteristics of the stanza, may be appropriate here. The most important of all, the most germane to the improvement which Shakespeare was to introduce in blank verse, and the most indicative of the new stage on which prosody was entering, is the care with which the poet varies the pause of the successive lines within the stanza, and thereby at once increases its *integrity*, and prevents it from becoming monotonous. Over and over again, in fact as the rule, you will find stanzas where no two consecutive lines have the same pause ; and very often there is *no* pause very strongly marked, so that the verses are punctuated only by the rhyme. Further, there is constant *enjambement* between the *lines*, though it is regularly avoided between the stanzas. In the final Alexandrines Spenser succeeds in varying largely, though he does not deliberately avoid, that strict middle pause which the metre invites in most modern languages, and especially in English. The other lines are mostly strict decasyllables, trisyllabic equivalence, though it sometimes appears, being for the most part eschewed, and for an obvious reason, that its frequent occurrence would too much break and ripple the even wave-like flow of the verse. Double rhymes he does not altogether avoid, and he sometimes, though very rarely, takes the Wyatt licence of rhyming on different parts of the same termination ; but the latter is always a blemish, and the former not an improvement. Lastly, *clichés* or stop-gaps, though they do exist, are again very rare, and always give the idea of being mere temporary things, which the poet would have removed if he had been able finally to revise his work. After repeated trials, I have given up the attempt actually to *illustrate* these remarks as hopeless (unless one were to quote whole pages), but the hopelessness is itself the best illustration. No sooner have you selected a batch of stanzas, than the very next contains some

new example of Spenser's infinite variety. *Pretty* often, the stanza falls into sections of 4, 3, 2 lines; but just when you think the rule established fairly, exceptions accumulate in a way that does not prove but overthrows it. *Pretty* often, it launches itself on a basis of the old tetremimeral cæsura in the first line—only to double and twist under your hand when you think you have that hand down on it. You have no sooner discovered one of his dainty devices than he drops it, and shows you another. As in other respects of the poem, this chase is *gratissimus error*, and you gain all sorts of pleasant and profitable things from it: but there is no end to it as such.

INTERCHAPTER IV

In the preceding pages an attempt has been made to trace the prosodic history of the four first centuries of definitely English poetry, from its rally after the Norman Conquest, to the time when Spenser reformed, reorganised, and refitted it for the career which it has pursued ever since. With the work of his greater and later contemporaries—with that of those who may have conceivably felt his influence, or the influences which helped his genius to produce its own perfect expression—we have not yet meddled. But their postponement is a matter, not of accident, or of merely mechanical convenience, but of deliberate system.

In these four centuries, the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth—with a certain laying hands on the flitting shades of the twelfth, to balance the exclusion of the solid figures of the sixteenth itself, whom we do not here impress—we have endeavoured to deal with every prosodic phenomenon that presents itself individually, and in the chronological succession of poetic work—surveying them at intervals in groups from the same chronological point of view, and reserving fresh surveys from certain others for the Appendices, though the matter of these last may be sometimes glanced at by anticipation here. The first principle of this treatment has been the most loyal admission of the facts, and the most sedulous exclusion of not-facts, that the writer could achieve. The second has been the assumption that these facts are *live* facts—that they are related to each other in a connection of real development, and not of dead or mechanical engineering. In pursuance of this

latter postulate—as perhaps the children of this world would in their more wisdom call it were it their own—I have laid much less stress than most writers on English prosody have laid on the metres in earlier literatures from which English metres are supposed to be imitated, and much more on the sporadic and apparently casual appearance of these metres in English itself, before they became the rule. I am myself quite sure that English prosody is, and has been, a living thing for seven hundred years at least: and these casual appearances of the ova before the par, of the par before the salmon, of a stray salmon before the schools or couples, are to me one of the main proofs of this life.

From Godric to Spenser—even from the author of the Canute song to the author of the *Canterbury Tales*—is no doubt a mighty transition, but it is a transition every step of which I believe to have been made fairly clear in the foregoing pages. That every language has the prosody which it deserves is an *epigrammation* in which I thoroughly believe: and therefore I have endeavoured to show that the prosodic characteristics which the intermixture of French and Latin with Old English brought about begin to show themselves from the very first. But that any language which, like English, is composite in materials, and extremely rebel to hard and fast laws of any kind in temperament, must attain the full use of its prosody slowly, is a fact of which I have even less doubt. To begin with, prosody cannot be full-fledged till the feathers of the language are well moulted and regrown: and you cannot get a tongue to sing its best tunes when it is babbling inarticulatenesses like the final *e*, which have come to stand for twenty different things grammatically, and to be prosodically usable or negligible at pleasure. Nor can you get things settled till it has been decided whether naturalised words are to keep their foreign, or adopt their English, pronunciation and quantification. Nor in any other way can things be made ready until they are ready to be made so.

That period, however, has been at last reached. With

Chaucer we were out of the rudiments of strictly Middle English prosody. With Spenser we are out of the rudiments of English prosody altogether. It has not taken its last degrees ; we may very fervently hope that it never will do so, for the steps of that stair are infinite, and end only in the Infinite itself. But it has passed master with Spenser, as it had passed something more than bachelor with Chaucer.

It is probably not necessary to recapitulate the chronicle of its progress as an undergraduate, or of its *inter*graduate experiences. These should have been given sufficiently. They represent—to me—an unbroken process of development, effected to some extent by positive imitation, precept, and study, to most by letting the grass grow, and the air breathe, and the water run. Some of these phenomena we shall regroup in a different fashion in the Appendices. But on the two great pathological experiences of Middle and Transitional English verse we may say a little more.

There are some who are loath to call one of these—the Alliterative revival or survival of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—a disease at all. I cannot myself doubt that it was. Hoops and tops (unless they impinge on the shins and toes of the aged) are admirable things for children ; but grown men can find better amusements and exercises. Moreover, puerility and immaturity were not the only defects of the Alliterative movement. It was a more or less deliberate "sinning of mercies"—a more or less fretful flying in the face of Providence, which had compassed the kind craft of rhyme and metre, which had endowed that craft with powers and possibilities of intellectual-sensuous delectation surpassing anything known, and which saw it abandoned, wholly or partly, for the half-barbarous and very limited charms of its rival. I have already declared, and I repeat with absolute sincerity, that I do not dislike alliterative poetry at all—that I can enjoy all or nearly all of it fairly, and its best examples very much. But the more I read even these, though my special enjoyment of them does not diminish,

but on the contrary increases, the more thoroughly I am convinced of the extreme and unalterable limitations of the method at its best, and of the foolish and indeed senseless corruptions to which it exposes itself at its worst. It has, let it be repeated, no future: "you get no more of it," as the contemporary *cliché* went. Even the vivid narrative power, the romantic imagination, the quaint and fresh word-levying of the author of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, are obviously hampered rather than helped by it; and *he* borrows the aid of rhyme to some extent, as others do still more. *Cleanness* could not, in parts, be finer; but *Cleanness* is, after all, a sermon with embroidered passages, for which rhythmical prose would have been better still than this verse. Langland we could hardly wish other than he is; but then Langland (to whom the remark just made as to sermons also to some extent applies) is quite *sui generis*, and required a method that should be at least a species to itself. *The Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo* is a brilliant *tour de force*, if ever there was one; but even here, if ever there was one, it is a *tour de force*.

Very much worse was the case with those apparently unintentional degradations of prosody into which England (in the narrow sense) fell during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and from which Scotland did not, as we have seen in speaking of Gavin Douglas, entirely escape. Here there are at first sight no "condolences," no "vails" whatsoever, except to those whom we may call *les morticoles* of literature, who like to study disease and analyse monstrosities. What the Two Poets of the trinity—Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate—which absorbed poetical worship so long, thought when they heard the tread of the Third, would be a very pretty thing to know if we could only get it in some budget of News from Parnassus. I am not sure that Gower would not have been shocked: Gower was a man who could take things very seriously. But Chaucer, either in his "Adam Scrivener" mood or in his "Sir Thopas" mood, would indeed be good to hear on the subject, and, I am inclined to think, still better on

some modern editors of this matter. Here, however, there is hardly room for the divergence of view which has been noticed in the other case. Dull poets we have often, nay almost always, had with us, and we have sometimes extended tolerance to unpoetical poets; but at no other time, in the poetical history of England, have we had actual confusion of poetic tongues, an epidemic of doggerel and jargon lasting and raging for the best part of a century, if not more. Alexander Barclay died, it has been said, in the year when Spenser was born, and a hundred and fifty years after the death of Chaucer. In at least five-sixths of those hundred and fifty years (barring carol and ballad on the one hand, and, according to the orthodox, such things as *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Court of Love*, which are utterly different from the formal poetry of the time, on the other) nothing was put forth by any versifier from Penzance to Berwick but what shows signs of this extraordinary disease. "They stutter o'er blessing, they stutter o'er ban; They stutter drunk and dry," and if the Red Fisherman himself can tell us the reason, he is certainly the only person who can. At least nobody else ever has told it.[1]

At the same time, the strange contribution which both these afflictions—conjointly with and hardly less than the contemporary growth and practice of carol and ballad—made to the health, the life, the powers and charms of English prosody, though it has been more than once acknowledged before, has hardly been enough insisted on, has certainly not been insisted on too much. Indirectly or directly both made for the loose free motion, the facility of equivalence and substitution—

> The swing and sway and swing,
> The sway and swing and sway,

as poor Amy Levy wrote of waltz-time—that distinguish

[1] The nearest approach to telling is Mr. Ker's dissertation on the *Arte Mayor* (*v. inf.* App. VI. on "Metres"). There is much in it with which I heartily agree. But when Mr. Ker ends, "The old tunes rang in their ears too incessantly for the new kinds of verse to make their way," I feel inclined to subjoin, "Yes; but how had Chaucer managed to close *his* ears so effectually?" I think I know how, but I am not certain.

and permeate and inspirit and enchant English poetry. I am sometimes inclined to put down the very revival-survival of alliteration itself to a dim unconscious avoidance of the rigidity which the more "Frenchified" metrical arrangements seemed to threaten. I am certain that the alliterative lines themselves constantly tended to break up into the ballad metre on the one hand, and into pure anapæsts on the other. And we have seen how the ungainly decasyllables-that-are-no-decasyllables of the poets from Lydgate to Barclay, while on the one hand they invited tightening and shaping into their normal form, were on the other ready to break down or out into the plain doggerel, which in like manner was alliterative *débris*, or to reform themselves in this or that fashion to fourteeners, "poulter's measure," or anapæsts again. The whole thing, in short, may be compared to a tumultuary exercise in gymnastics without a gymnasiarch. It is at first sight a mere chaos of waving legs and arms, of bodies tumbling in every direction and in the clumsiest attitudes. But it is exercise; it is not mere backboard drill; it strengthens the muscles, and prepares them for regular and rhythmical movement when the time and the teacher come. While as for the best of the ballads and carols, *they* have already achieved or kept, the one the secret of liberty that shall not exclude order, the other the secret of order that shall not cramp or cripple nature. And to everything and everybody there was coming, as an additional revelation, the clearer knowledge of the admirable grace and concinnity of the old classical prosodies.

The first native gymnasiarch who came at all was Wyatt, and an endeavour has been made to do justice to what he did. It was undoubtedly most important, and its importance consisted—with doubt which seems to me as little—much more in the quality of the new patterns which he held up, and endeavoured to follow, than in his actual achievement. The strict Italian measures of sonnet and the rest—the strict French measures of the madrigal type—were not merely at once styptic to the flux, and lissoming to the stiffness, of the

prevailing versification, but they were in the first case quite new and alterative, in the second different from the French poetry which had been generally followed. Surrey, as was inevitable, improved on Wyatt, and had he had time would, I think, have improved much more; for they were both poets, though poets under singular disadvantages. But I have always thought that scant justice has been done to the generation which followed the two. It produced few who were poets as Wyatt and Surrey themselves were, but it produced earnest and enthusiastic versifiers who profited by their pioneership. Sackville, who *was* a poet *sans phrase*, and the only one of the group of whom as much can be said, tried nothing in non-dramatic verse but rhyme-royal. Yet how surprising is the way in which he managed to free rhyme-royal itself from the disfigurement with which its fair face had been afflicted! how instructive his unequal success with the blank verse in which, on the contrary, he was hardly more than a pioneer! Gascoigne and Turberville manage, sometimes at least, to be musically as well as mechanically passable, and more; Googe and Tusser and the early miscellanists seldom fail at least of the mechanical. And, meanwhile, blank verse itself was presenting a new possibility of mechanism and music, combined in infinite variety; the legion-fashioned doggerel of the plays served as novice-work in the preparation of forms whereof blank verse itself was but one; and ever and anon the wood-note, or the tavern-note, or the solemn descant, in ballad and song and carol, reminded every one who could hear, and would, that the true harp of Ariel was ready for him who could use it. While, once more, the classical prosodies, understood and even misunderstood, reminded men of Order, Symmetry, Restraint.

The first who was fully ready, with the discipline of classical and early modern regularity, and the life of ancient English freedom, was Spenser, and I do not think it necessary to add to what I have said of Spenser above. Like his master Chaucer, he did not affect the purer and

lighter lyric, because, like his master, he could not do everything. And it was better that he should not. This purer and lighter lyric, the highest and most charming form of poetry when it is perfect, drops to something a good deal below perfection with an alarming facility, and requires either an entirely unsophisticated, or a perfectly trained, Poetic and Rhetoric, to enable it to keep its proper region. This Poetic and this Rhetoric, though painful efforts to recover them and fit them for the new conditions of language had been made for a generation before him, had not been fully recovered. It was Spenser who effected the recovery: he was the new poet who founded the new poetry.

Onorate——!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

EQUIVALENCE, SUBSTITUTION, AND FOOT-ARRANGEMENT IN ENGLISH

It has always appeared to me undesirable, when it can possibly be avoided, to interrupt a history by argument, and by critical dissertations. The system of Interchapters (in which I believe the more the longer I practise it) provides a place for part of the matter thus excluded; but not for all. And in regard to this subject more particularly, it is almost necessary to deal with some points of prosodic *doctrine*, which not merely emerge from, and are illustrated by, that portion of the history which we have now surveyed, but will be constantly important in that which is to come. In some cases the handling will have to be supplemented by similar appendices in other volumes; but not in all.[1]

The first of these points, or the first group of them, is indicated by the title above. I have constantly used, and if I carry out my plan shall constantly be using, the terms "Equivalence" and "Substitution" in senses which, though strictly justified by derivation, analogy, and even parallel usage, are not perhaps exactly understanded of all people. By Equivalence I mean the position that in English, as in classical versification, two "short" syllables are equal to one "long," and the deduction from this that three syllables may be considered as equal to two, although their symbolic expressions may be, as in the case of an anapæst (⏑ ⏑ – or ½, ½, 1) for an iamb (⏑ – or ½, 1), not

[1] They will in all cases afford a more decent place than the text for the results of many years' thought on the subject, before, and long before, this book was even dimly projected. Thought without reading generally leads a man wrong; but reading without thought almost necessarily leads him nowhere. I have done a good deal of thinking in my life, especially in solitary walking, which has been my chief form of recreation, and my preferred method of getting to and from work. And I have thought of prosody at least as often as of anything—the two "modes of motion," I suppose, physically or metaphysically suggesting each other. But I have chosen—perhaps unwisely—to give *fermenta cognitionis* here rather than elaborate dissertations.

mathematically equivalent. By Substitution I mean the process of manipulating these individual equivalents, so as to present equivalent groups or lines in metre.

It has been held by some—for instance by my friend of long ago, the late Father Gerard Hopkins, in the letter quoted by Mr. Bridges in his *Prosody of Milton*—while I am not certain whether Mr. Bridges does not to some extent hold it himself—that Equivalence and Substitution are modern things, that they did not exist in the period which this volume specially covers. I should hope that the volume itself has completely and finally disposed of this enormous and incomprehensible error—if I had not read my Spenser too well to believe that any Blatant Beast ever dies. We have seen that Equivalence and Substitution exist in St. Godric at the very fountain-head; we have seen that, in varying degrees, and as practised more or less frequently by different poets at different times, they exist continuously from Godric to Spenser. We have also seen, indeed, that there were periods, poets, and portions of poetry in which, and in whom, for the reason that French models were most powerful with them, Equivalence and Substitution, which did not exist in those models, were avoided or sparingly practised. And we might have seen already, and shall see very shortly, that, when prosodic theory at last made its appearance, an idea (quite unjustified logically and historically, and founded once more on the practice of French, backed up by *some* classical examples, such as the Sapphic and Alcaic metres) also appeared that they *ought* to be avoided. But we shall also see this was a mere crotchet, that it arose at a bad time, that it was never wholly regarded, and that the disregard of it was rewarded by increased poetic charm.

It can hardly be necessary, but may be worth while, to repeat that the disorganisation of verse during the fifteenth century, though it undoubtedly had something to do with the subsequent prevalence of an objection to Substitution, is in reality no argument against it. It was not by substituting feet in a clearly comprehended decasyllable, so as to produce musical variations, that Lydgate and Occleve, Barclay and Hawes erred; but by a kind of flurried and purblind groping after a decasyllable that they could not find.

At the same time it is very doubtful whether, with the possible exception of Spenser in "February," etc., a single poet of this time *deliberately* adopted the process of Substitution. The ancestral tradition, straight and unbroken from Anglo-Saxon times, of a "free" line; the mysterious tendency in blood, eye, ear which had disposed the race to that tradition; the influence of

musical tunes; nay, the very heart-throb and brain-soar[1] which prompt, and are relieved by, emancipation from the humdrum regularity of the iambic (the "measure nearest prose" for all its marvellous poetic capabilities), supply quite enough explanation of the practice. But every one of them adds confirmation strong to the fact, patent in itself, of their existence.

In consequence, partly, of that existence, the foot or group-division of English, as of all prosodies which admit a similar arrangement, is not entirely plain sailing. The difficulties, never very serious, which present themselves, may have been in part the cause of the accent theory. That theory, at its worst, represents English prosody as a kind of drunkard, staggering from tree to tree or other support, and caring only to get hold of the next without calculating the distance between, or the number and measure of the steps which take him to it. In this form it may be, as we shall see, good for doggerel; it is certainly not good for anything else. But even when not pushed quite so far, it has the inconvenience (exemplified in Guest's "sections") of accepting *any* conglomeration of syllables which observes one or two arbitrary laws, such as that "separation of accents" which is the fondest thing ever vainly invented. That the whole, or almost the whole, "grace and liberty of the composition" are thereby lost does not matter.

On the other hand, the foot or group-system requires *correspondence* of feet or groups, and, thus preserving a decent liberty, at once enjoins and explains (as far as it is explicable) that grace which is still more "decent" in the Latin sense and phrase, and which is, in fact, the main charm of English poetry.

Even thus, however, a certain liberty of explanation will follow the liberty of construction; and though an acute, delicate, and well-trained ear will seldom have much difficulty in preferring one systematic explanation to another, it may not always be so. For even in Greek—the impeccable pattern of Freedom *and* Order in Prosody—a variety of specification, or at least a variety of nomenclature, is in certain cases possible to those (and perhaps more specially to those) who have thoroughly acquainted themselves with the root of the matter.

To illustrate the elasticity of the system, and its suitableness to the corresponding elasticity of English verse, let us take two or three modern fragments of no importance poetically, and therefore not too good to play tricks with, but metrically suitable enough:—

[1] It seems sometimes to be forgotten, by those whom the "irregularity" of broken iambics disturbs, that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides practised them.

All the good days,
Look you, are done ;
Quenched are the rays
That poured from the sun ;
The moon looks down
Upon no girl's kiss ;
In country and town
Vanished is bliss.

Now this may be approached, from the point of scansion, in various ways, and the lines, taken severally, would justify more than one base of metrification. Line 1 possibly—

⏑ ⏓ ⏓ –
All the[1] | good days,

and line 5 certainly—

⏑ – ⏓ –
The moon | looks down,

if taken alone, would indicate iambic monometer acatalectic, and the more wooden metrists of this school might take the whole on this basis, scanning the rest, with a few trisyllabic licences, as—

⏑ ⏓ ⏑ –
Look you, | are done ;

– ⏓ ⏑ –
Quenched are | the rays

⏑ – ⏑ ⏓ –
That poured | from the sun ;

. . . .

⏑ ⏑ – ⏓ –
Upon no | girl's kiss ;

⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ –
In coun|try and town

– ⏑ ⏑ –
Vanished | is bliss.

Those who lean, on the other hand, to a go-as-you-please scansion, who think uniformity of line-value too "rigid," and like to detect occasional and abnormal feet, might see amphibrachs in—

⏑ – ⏑
That poured from,

⏑ – ⏑
In country.

But the most natural scheme, *when the whole is read*, is that of *anapæstic* monometer,[2] with free monosyllabic as well as dissyllabic substitution—

[1] For this double quantification see Appendix II., "Common Syllables in English."

[2] Using the term properly ; but see Glossary.

– ⏑ ⏑ –
All | the good days,
– ⏑ ⏑ –
Look you, | are done;
– ⏑ ⏑ –
Quenched | are the rays
⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ –
That poured | from the sun;
⏑ – ⏑ –
The moon | looks down
⏑ ⏑ – – –
Upon no | girl's kiss;
⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ –
In coun|try and town
– ⏑ ⏑ –
Vanished | is bliss,

where 2 (but hardly, if not impossibly, 8) also admits of a monosyllabic first foot, and 1 and 3 might be choriambic, like 2 and 8 in the schedule given.

I do not think that this system, thus exemplified, will be charged by any person, at once fair-minded and intelligent, with over-rigidity. There may seem, at a glance, more weight in the charge of over-elasticity—in fact, of mere looseness; but I do not think this is rightly so. "The bearings" of *any* prosodic system that is rationally inductive must "lie in the application of it." And this system, thus applied, seems to me at once to retain a sufficient character and principle of its own in its insistence on line-and-foot equivalence, and to lend itself sufficiently to the requirements of the subject-matter, in its permission of licensed but not licentious or unprincipled substitution. (The number of *common* syllables allowed may seem excessive, but a moment's thought will show that this is an independent question.[1])

Take another example, also *in corpore vili*, from a trivial muse, addressing the famous Wiltshire "sarsen" stones:—

O Wethers Grey,
Ye saw the day
I (far away)
  Remember:
Silver and green
Was all the scene
In that serene
  November.

Here the syllabification is uniform and unmistakable, but the foot-distribution, and even that of the line, may vary. That

[1] See once more Appendix II.

"ghost-foot" in English, the amphibrach, again suggests itself, and, as the lines are printed above, excusably. But, when they are examined carefully, they are seen to be nothing but one of the two or three very oldest metrical arrangements in English proper, the "fifteener" or iambic dimeter couplet, acatalectic and catalectic alternately, of the *Ormulum*, new pointed and timed by rhyme, so that the unmusical thump thump of

O bro|ther Wal|ter, bro|ther mine, |
After | the flesh|'s kindè,

takes on, without a single change of purely *metrical* constitution either in foot or syllable, a *rhythmical* quality rather revealed than imparted by the rhyme itself. The connection of this *fif*teener with the *four*teener of Robert of Gloucester is, as has been allowed, a moot and mootable point. I used to think them more widely separated than I do now. But the *allotropic* faculties of the fourteener itself[1] are among the most apparently extraordinary and really simple phenomena of the whole subject. Nothing perhaps shows so well the "Power of the Keys" of Equivalence and Substitution. The simplest expression of the form can lumber as well without the fifteenth syllable as with it—a fact only too well known and exemplified in all ages of English poetry. Yet this very form *without* syllabic change, but by subtle magic of accent and vowel-value, can give the ineffable harmonies peculiar to the Caroline period. And *with* syllabic change it becomes "a very opal" at once in variety and in beauty. Of the variety, if not of the beauty, conferred by substitution and equivalence, another "school-copy" may give a working example :—

Bare is | my bas|net-top, | my love,
Of rose | or rose|marÿe—
Nor bough | nor flower | at a|ny hour
On my | crest might | men see.

But it's O | on the day | when I saw | you first,
For a branch | of the row|an tree !
To have kept | me safe | from you, | my love,
For a black | witch as | ye be !

In the first stanza the writer keeps to the strict iamb (or dissyllabic foot, to steer clear of controversy as far as possible), with just a suspicion of trisyllabism in "flower" and "hour," which also borrow the extra time-beat of internal rhyme. But the second stanza, so to say, "opens out" into full licence of substitution, which, however, is prevented from suggesting a radically anapæstic *basis* by frequent iambic "reminders," and

[1] For more on this see Appendix VI., "Metres."

especially—a point worth note—by the arresting effect of the persistent *final* iambic. This desirableness, if not actual necessity, of keeping the base-foot in evidence at the close of the line, is apparently natural, and appears in versification, wherever Equivalence and Substitution exist, from the ancient classical hexameter and trimeter downwards. It, with the general prevalence of iambs in the last two lines, "brings up" and arrests anything too headlong in the all but completely anapæstic gallop of the first two, which in themselves represent an outburst of rhythmical feeling, as contrasted with the measured and restrained pace of the opening stanza.[1]

In the period with which we have been dealing the study of these two subjects is less delightful than at some others, but it is all the more important. Our two consummate poets, Chaucer and Spenser, though they both used them, used them comparatively little (whence perhaps the error referred to at the beginning of this excursus), and (except a few unknown ballad- and carol-writers) few of those who did use them were even deacons in their craft. Yet we have been able to trace them in an unbroken chain from the thirteenth century (if not the twelfth itself) to the sixteenth, and we have seen what vivacity and vigour of wing they give to verse. For a time their company will not be so much with us as we could wish; but the White Lady will not wholly forsake her well, or let her girdle vanish, and after many days it will shine once more "as broad as the baldric of an earl."

[1] One or two other suggestions as to feet may be added. It is, I think, a mistake to try to make foot- correspond with word-division: the best metre is often that which divides the words most. And it is rash to assign too positive qualities to particular feet—the "slow iambic" (cf. "*celeres* iambos"), the "tripping trochee," etc. Foot-qualities are mainly *values*; they arise from juxtaposition and contrast more than intrinsically.

APPENDIX II

COMMON SYLLABLES IN ENGLISH, AND DEGREES IN QUANTITY

If the "common" syllable is not the greatest crux in English prosody, it has been, apparently, the greatest stumbling-block. Nothing so much as its extreme abundance, and its fluctuating character, would seem to have been at the root of the extraordinary proposition that there is "no quantity in English"—a proposition met and demolished by every line of English poetry. It is more astonishing that this very abundance, and this very fluctuating character, should not have guided the heretics to the very simple truth that accent is one of the causes (and perhaps the main cause) that *make* quantity in English. But, putting this aside, the facts evidently require examination from us, and we may here proceed to give it.

It is only fair to say that "commonness" of quantity seems generally to have proved itself something of a difficulty, though, as I venture to think, unnecessarily and even surprisingly. The *locus classicus* on the subject as regards ancient literature is, of course, the famous passage of Martial, *Ep.* ix. 11 (12)—

> Graeci quibus est nihil negatum,
> Et quos Ἄρες ἄρες decet sonare.
> Nobis non licet esse tam disertis,
> Qui Musas colimus severiores.

My friend and colleague, Professor Hardie, than whom I know nobody better entitled to the praise of being *doctus sermones utriusque linguae*, would, I believe, limit this extra freedom of Greek to proper names, as to which I have the temerity to differ with him. But however this may be, there is no doubt of the *existence* of common syllables in both tongues. It may even be contended that the whole doctrine of quantity *by position* depends upon the existence of an antecedent commonness, while the licence of shortening before a combination into which a liquid enters puts contention altogether aside.[1] And still more germane

[1] I do not enter into any discussion here of the nature and degrees of quantity

to the matter is the lengthening of syllables *in arsi*, etc., this latter, indeed, coming remarkably close to, if it is not actually identical with, the English practice of lengthening by the presence of accent or stress, and shortening in its absence. Of what has been called the extreme abundance, and the fluctuating character, of common syllables in English there can, however the matter stands in the classical languages, be no doubt. And in my mind at least there is also no doubt that this prevalence is no obstacle to an orderly prosodic consideration and evaluation of them. It was natural that, in the first epidemic of classical "versing," an attempt should be made to lug "quantity by position" head and shoulders into English. But even then acuter judgments saw that it would not do—that "cārpĕntĕr" never would allow itself to be scanned "cārpēntĕr," talk the versers never so learnedly. At the same time (or, chronologically speaking, at a wholly different one, and nearly 400 years earlier) we have in the remarkable spelling system of the *Ormulum*, with its doubling of the consonant after a *short* vowel, and leaving of it single after a long, a link between orthography and orthoepy which has subsisted to the present day, and differentiates true from false spelling of English in a way, if not exactly prosodic, yet trenching close on prosody. From the documents, however, of this same squabble, and from one of the maddest of them, we can extract some sound and useful sense on the subject. Stanyhurst had noticed (what some more modern writers on prosody do not seem to have noticed) that the definite article has two entirely different and differently quantified pronunciations[1] in English, "thēē" and thĕ, or even "th'," with such a faint though still existent pronunciation of the vowel that it is rather a breath than a note. With his usual neck-or-nothing system, he spells it accordingly "thee" when he wants it long, "the" when he wants it short. The proceeding is itself unnecessary, ugly, confusing, almost childish; but the principle, and the recognition of that principle underlying it, are correct and important. "Thē" and "thĕ" are actual alternative constituents of the English prosodic lexicon, ready for the English poet to use at his discretion, if also at his peril.[2]

So it is again with "me" and "my," which similarly take the

in Latin, according to the ancient metrists. I am not ignorant of the matter; but, here, the matter is irrelevant to me save as noted below, p. 391.

[1] One might even say that it has three—"thēē," "thĕ" before a vowel, and "th'" before a consonant. But *prosodically* the two latter are equivalent.

[2] A great deal of harm has been done by refusing to recognise this, and the refusal has led to an idea of the English muses as more "severely" slavish than even their Roman sisters. I should like to have, for my next volume, a frontispiece of "Discretion guarded by Peril" in the early manner of Sir Joshua.

pronounced, and therefore the prosodic, values of "mee" and "me," of "migh" and "me" again. And it is very important to notice that *it is not absolutely necessary that very strong stress of meaning or probable elocution* should justify the use of the long forms. It will, indeed, be impossible for the poet to use the short forms when there is such stress, but he may occasionally use the long ones without it. This is where the discretion and the peril come in. And it may almost be said that the majority of commonly used monosyllables, such as "man," follow this rule.

In words not monosyllabic the discretion has to be still more discreet, and the peril is greater. As a general rule modern practice has tended to restriction, in certain ways at any rate. The ancestral and ingrained English habit of throwing the accent back as far as possible has carried the quantity with it, in a manner sometimes impossible to disregard. The practice of discriminating identically spelt nouns and verbs, in such cases as "cōnvĕrt" and "cŏnvērt," cannot safely be neglected by the poet. But formerly he enjoyed greater liberty in this respect, not to mention that up to Spenser (and for the matter of that up to Dryden, and even later) the French accent prevailed generally, or existed as a matter of option, in many words, and governed their quantity accordingly. Yet during the greater part of the period on which we are here more specially looking back, it would be, though an exaggeration, not an absolute falsehood, to say that English was prosodically a language of common syllables, with a considerable number of constant exceptions, and with a very much larger number of exceptions *pro hac vice*, under the particular conditions of the case. The practice of poetry, especially by good poets, tended to introduce a greater strictness, but never established an absolute one. Stanyhurst is again profitable for instruction in prosodic righteousness (however abominably his practice may topple and swerve from the upright) in more than one remark on "commonness." He sees (what Guest did *not* see) that a compound word like "sea-room" (one of his own examples), "sunbeam," "moonbeam," can have two distinct prosodic values, – ⏑ and – –, according as it is regarded as one word or two. And though time has decided against him in his wish to carry the accent-quantity of "imperative" and "orthography," as well as that of "planetary" and "matrimony," back to the fourth syllable, yet his general principle—that the ear, not the eye, must decide—is sound enough.

Perhaps the key to the apparently licentious usage and abuse of the common syllable in English is to be found in the fact, recognised by the ancients, and more recognisable, if not more

recognised, by us, that there are *degrees* in quantity. The attempt to measure these degrees mathematically or musically seems to me as idle as it is impossible : indeed, I should say that they vary in relation to the reader much more than to the writer, and so are quite incalculable, while each poet has a "Poet's Weight" of his own,[1] with individual grains and scruples. But they certainly exist. And if they exist in such a fashion that one syllable is a little short of absolute "length," it will be seen how easily it may be "put up" or "put down" to that standard, or away from it. Nor is it the weakest argument for the truth and value of the foot- or group-system that this, and this only, provides a rationally (not *ir*rationally) systematic explanation of prosody in such a language as English, without either capitulating to the slovenly go-as-you-please of the merely accentual doggerel and patter, or attempting the unnatural jargon of the extremer quantitative enthusiasts.

[1] Or, as a young friend of mine, Mr. Ian Colvin (poetically "Rip Van Winkle"), put it once in a letter to me, every poet's lines pivot for themselves, and run their own course to the goal.—I had at one time thought of devoting one of these Appendices to the heading of "Cadence," not in the sense discussed above (p. 160 *note*), but in that which made me demur to the absolute identification of Orm's metre with that of the *Moral Ode*, and makes me see differences between *Meum est propositum* and the "Good King Wenceslas" rhythm, *v. supra* (p. 54 *note*). But it will come better at a later stage. And so will the all-important subject of "Poetic *Diction*," which, though founded by Chaucer only to be swept away by causes over which he had no control, and refounded (let us hope permanently) by Spenser at the end of our period, has not yet been practised and developed *consciously* enough to be well studied.

APPENDIX III

THE NATURE AND PHENOMENA OF DOGGEREL

DOGGEREL (my printers prefer this spelling, and they have Chaucer at their back, so, though I myself write it "doggrel," I have not thought it worth while to trouble them with correction throughout) is a subject as inseparably connected with prosody as vice is with virtue. But it requires separate treatment here, because the word is not used univocally, and it would have been out of place above (pp. 241 *sq.*) to deal with all the senses. There are in fact two doggerels—it would hardly be more than a paradox to say that there is doggerel which is doggerel, and doggerel which is not. And, what is more, it so happens that the period of this volume exhibits the two kinds in a most interesting imbroglio. I cannot even undertake to have kept them quite apart, though I have endeavoured to do so as far as was possible: and it is for the purpose, mainly, of mending the impossibilities that I write this excursus.

Doggerel in the worst sense—the sense which we shall have always with us—is merely bad verse—verse which attempts a certain form or norm, and fails. It is quite possible to attempt even the better doggerel and fail in *it*; one may even say that it is extremely difficult not to do so. An enormous proportion of fifteenth and early sixteenth-century English verse is doggerel of this kind, owing not merely to the small capacities of the poets, but to the overmastering circumstances which have been sufficiently discussed. A very great deal of Lydgate, whether owing to his own fault or his copyists', consists of such doggerel; less of Occleve; a great deal again of Hawes and Barclay; an immense proportion of the early playwrights, among whom the "Doggerel-lado-Doblado," as Thackeray would put it—the doggerelist who cannot manage the doggerel he aims at,—is particularly prominent. The more regular poets of the generation between Surrey and Spenser constantly fall into it—the "poulter's measure" and the split decasyllable being especial doggerel-traps. In the period to which we are coming the ballad-metre succeeds these, the

Garlands and other printed ballad collections of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries being largely made up of it. Nor are the Jacobeans and Carolines themselves free. Wither is a frightful example of the poet who begins as a poet and ends as a doggerelist. We must not look too far ahead; but it is important to observe, with a view to what is to come almost immediately, that, the more prosaic a measure is in itself, the less is the danger of this doggerel, and that the severer restrictions, be they of Gascoigne, be they of Bysshe, are to a certain extent prophylactic against it. Blackmore, Glover, Pollok, and others, are dull—only those who have condemned themselves to read them know how dull; but they are not doggerel. Doggerel in this sense is something like the Greek "Frigidity" with a difference; you must try at lightness and brightness, at freedom and frolic, *and fail.* It is not mere prose cut into lengths quantified; it has a *bolgia* of its own, and a special ticket of admission thereto.

But there is doggerel (and a great deal of it in this time also; less at others, till the lighter metres are reinstated in the eighteenth century) which quite escapes the *Inferno*, though it would require a Dantean ingenuity and an ultra-Dantean good-nature to niche it in Paradise. Skelton has plenty of it; Heywood and some of the other early dramatists have more; indeed, the irregularities of their still earlier predecessors, whose work we have analysed in dealing with the Mysteries, have not a little; it is found as early (see examples) as the Vernon MS., and perhaps earlier. You get it in Shakespeare; it sits constantly at Butler's ear, though his strict bringing up at Cople perhaps makes him regularise it. Like the other kind, it has never died; and unlike the other kind, it ought never to die, though it is an exceedingly risky poetic implement, and he who uses it, uses it at his peril. This doggerel—if definition, or at least description, of it be required—is simply the using of recognised forms of verse, and of diction recognised or unrecognised, with a wilful licentiousness which is excused by the felicitous result. The poet is not trying to do what he cannot do; he is trying to do something exceptional, outrageous, shocking—and does it to admiration. Swift's rhyme of "Profane is" and "Aristophanes," which grieved Guest so to the soul, is "rhyme doggerel" with a vengeance—and I say we should carry him shoulder-high for it. Canning's "With my sentimentalibus lachrymae rorum" is all but doggerel in metre and quite in diction; and what would we give for an hour of Canning at this moment? You must—for Swift is the greatest of doggerelists as he is one of the greatest of men of letters,

and one may cite him twice—gulp and patter syllables at discretion to read "Mrs. Harris's Petition"; but how many would one *not* gulp?

For the doggerelist of this class—of whom Skelton is in our special period the master and king—is not merely justifiable according to that wicked process of "judging by the result" which shocked Dr. Johnson so much, but to which he evidently felt unholy yearnings. He *is* justified by his result—if he is not, he falls at once into the other class, and the Malebranche wait for him. But he can put in much higher claims than this. He is a light horseman, an archer and slinger, of the great English prosodic army, but he is a full private of it, and has all its rights. He represents—through, and as a successor of, the alliterative revivalists—the extreme wing of the oldest form of that army itself, the edges and fringes of the "mass" where the "mould" has made least impression. He is not "mere A.S."—there is much in him that Anglo-Saxon could never have managed—but he has kept its variety, its wonderful power of deploying and skirmishing.

Further, as has been pointed out already, this kind of doggerel has, especially at times and seasons, special justifications, of a kind interesting in themselves and priceless historically. Now it is (as I have no doubt it was in Skelton) a direct though perhaps unconscious *protest* against the inadequacy, against the positive faultiness, of the regular prosody of the time. Now it is, as in the case of Heywood and the better of his fellows, an excursion in quest of something better. Now, as in many of its best examples at all times, it is a device for bringing, within the poetical sphere of treatment, things which otherwise could not be brought.

But always it holds aloft, and rallies round, the banners—or let us say, in the case of so light, if not quite so holy a thing, the pennons—of Freedom and of Life. In some times—especially at our present time—it is one of the very few bands that still do hold them up, and still fight for them as "merry men" should. There may be a slight touch of the bastard about it; but the Falconbridges and the Dunois are not exactly the worst champions of their respective families; nor do they appear at the least perilous nicks of time. While, therefore, there is nothing, that even assumes the name of poetry or of verse, so bad as the bad doggerel, it is imperatively necessary not to be too severe—not to be severe at all—on doggerel of the right kind, appearing at the right time, subserving the right purpose, and contributing its right quota to the great total of poetic pleasure. Sometimes even we may put the king's robe on it, and his ring

on its finger, and mount it on his horse, and delight to honour it. What Italian had to get by resort to the amusing but much more bastard and questionable device of Macaronic; what French (always with a look of painful effort) starts in search of with jargon and with amphigouri—each of them still endeavouring to hide the debauch of diction with a cloak of prosodic correctness—English enjoys, in diction and prosody alike, with a grace of congruity which has not, I think for my part, received anything like due acknowledgment. Between Spenser and Skelton there is no choice; but in this, as in so many other things, to our most undeserved advantage, we are relieved from choosing. Skelton without Spenser would certainly not be a very goodly heritage; Spenser without Skelton would be a goodly one, but there might be something a little lacking still. Together they complete each other miraculously. And we have this completion not only *de facto* but *de jure*, in virtue of the very laws and principles which constitute English prosody and English poetry—as a result of the original process which formed and developed both.

APPENDIX IV

ALLITERATION AND ITS VARIETIES

I HAVE had to speak in the text (it was painful, but it had to be done) with some severity of the defects, inevitable or probable, of structural alliteration—the alliteration that takes upon itself the responsibility of rhythm-groups within the line. But I have endeavoured, as I best could, to point out that I have no objection even to this poetic dispensation within its limits, and to distinguish, as strongly as might be, between alliteration standing where it ought not and alliteration standing where it ought. I have, in fact, no doubt that the first was only a very pardonably mistaken misuse of the second; and that in the infancy or embryonic condition of English poetic art, as well as in that reversion to childish indiscipline which so often shows itself in really good adolescents, an ornament became a fetich, a gargoyle was mistaken for a cantilever.

But like ornaments in general, and gargoyles in particular, alliteration can be a very delightful thing, and can sometimes be of actual solid use. I believe alliteration, of the non-structural kind, to be almost what we may call an inseparable ornament of English verse, certainly an all but indispensable one. We have never dispensed with it except to our loss; we have often received from it infinite gain. And therefore I should like to say something more about it here.

Alliteration, to be genuine and effective, must, as it seems to me,[1] rest upon consonants, just as rhyme must (again as it seems to me) rest upon vowels. The old vowel alliteration was an obvious "easement" when the thing *had* to be done at any cost, and it may have had attractions in Anglo-Saxon which we do not appreciate now. But the rapid desertion of it in Middle English, and its almost total failure to appear in Modern, would seem to show that it has no real reason of being now. Before writing this, and in order not to trust too much to a general memory, I

[1] When I say "as it seems to me" I mean not a mere private opinion, but the result of examination of the actual facts.

have looked over many pages of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Tennyson, the four poets most likely to have used the effect consciously or unconsciously, if it exists. I find few traces of it at all, and none that seem to have any particular lesson for us. Even so strong an instance of identical vowel alliteration (and it need not, as most people know, be identical) as

Of old Olympus (*P. L.* vii. 7),

does not, to my ear at least, produce any special effect, good or bad: one neither welcomes it nor wishes it away. In the great line of *Oenone*—

Idalian Aphrodite beautiful—

there may seem, at first hearing, to be something gained by the vowel alliteration; but a very little reflection will, I think, show that the harmony in contrast of the two initial syllables is quite independent of their having no consonant before them, that it is, in fact, a case of "Vowel Music" (as I call it below), not of alliteration at all.

With the pure consonant alliteration, deftly and not too lavishly used, it is quite different. We shall see (and therefore I shall take no examples beyond our period here) that it maintains its place victoriously in every age of English poetry, and is refused by heretical theorists and practicians only to their loss and damage. But it was, naturally and necessarily, never more rife than in our present time.

It can, of course, easily be overdone and burlesqued—more easily perhaps than the other kind. It is not unworthy of note that the stock parody-insult, "alliteration's artful aid," is not pure consonant alliteration at all, but vowel alliteration.

There are, indeed, considerations which might make us expect more imperfect examples than perfect ones. There is the inherited tendency to fetich-worship; there is the generally puerile and pupillary lack of mastery and restraint; and there is probably in a great many cases, even of metrists and rhymesters, a secret desire to imitate and borrow the devices of the other side, matching the itch for metre and rhyme among the alliterators. Yet not a little of the best charm of the best metrical poetry of our four hundred years is due to properly managed consonantal alliteration. Chaucer himself is a master of it, as of most things. The famous line already quoted—

That all the Orient laugheth of the light—

owes a great deal of its beauty to the *l*'s which, though the structure of the line does not in the very least rest on them, not merely "stick a rose in its hair," but assist the run and music of

it very remarkably, as if with a kind of added accompaniment. Long before Chaucer, *Alisoun* and her sisters are full of it; in his time or later "E.I.O." and the great Carol, and *Quia Amore Langueo*, owe to it some of their subtlest charms. If it adds to the annoying effect of the bad doggerel, it forms no mean seasoning to the good.

Nowhere is it more in place (for "their fathers were acquainted," as Prince Charlie says in *Redgauntlet* to General Campbell, and said in fact, if we may trust "Zeluco" Moore, to the Duke of Hamilton) than in the ballad metre. Later, it will follow up the developments which Chaucer had indicated in couplet and rhyme-royal, and elsewhere among the statelier measures; here it is at home from the first. To attempt to get rules and classifications out of the elfin variety of its appearances would be Teutonic and not tolerable. But it seems to me that the best ballad use of alliteration is when it comes in, either with stock phrases ("the bent and the bonny broom," etc.) where it is expected, or, after an absence of some time, where it is *not* expected. Very often it announces or coincides with a trisyllabic foot (cf. "thou ne *wate in whatekyn* state" in "E.I.O.," and "a *colar he cast* about his neck" in "Glasgerion"). It ought never to be quite insignificant: and it is sometimes a kind of punctuation.

The mid-sixteenth century poets, as is well known, "hunted the letter" rather hard, and the critics of the time immediately succeeding affected to despise it. But it is very noticeable that Spenser—who despised nothing that was old, was shy of nothing that was new, and utilised everything old and new that was good with a quiet and confident mastery—does not despise alliteration at all, and extracts admirable graces and garnishments from it. I have just counted six alliterations, each in a different line, in the first stanza of the *Faerie Queene* that I turned up by hazard —no one of them ineffective or meaningless. Sometimes (as almost every poet who alliterates much must be) he is a little excessive, but rarely, and some of the chief beauties of his most beautiful passages are due to the "artful aid."

Never, therefore, however insufficient and artificial may alliteration of the structural kind have been, however unequal to the duties that were laid upon it, however great an unintentional burlesque may be Douglas's

> Baleful business both bliss and brightness can boast,

and however great an intentional one Shakespeare's

> The praiseful princess pierced and pricked a pretty pleasing pricket,

will it be allowable to scorn the "hunting of the letter" when

that hunting is conducted in reasonable fashion, and results in a noble or even a tolerable quarry. Its extension to whole words or the greater part of them, such as

> So passeth in the passing of a day,

and its distant (and not so very distant) relation to the figure epanaphora, where words or groups of words are repeated in important positions, would take us too long to dwell upon. But both of them belong to the family, and both were especially cultivated in this period. Both they, and Alliteration itself, belong rather to what we have called rhetorical Prosody, or prosodic Rhetoric, than to Prosody pure and simple; but Alliteration at least is too closely associated with this to be stinted of treatment.

APPENDIX V

ENGLISH FEET—1200-1600

In basing this excursus on the list of classical feet given above in the short technical Glossary prefixed to the text (a list which is nothing but a strictly mathematical analysis of the possible permutations of "long" and "short" values), we shall have to exclude some things and to add some. But neither of the exclusions nor of the additions need very much be said, beneath and above the combinations of two and three such values. I have already stated that, in my examination of English poetry during the seven centuries of our total period, I have found no instance, out of sheer doggerel and patter, where feet of four syllables are required to explain the facts, or are naturally suggested by them. As for five-syllable feet I do not think them required even in the valuation of prose rhythm, where the four-syllable feet certainly come in. On the other hand, the monosyllabic foot, which only exists in Greek under the forms of anacrusis and catalexis (*vide* Glossary again), is found nearly throughout; and I repeat that I think the scansion to be improved in many cases, chiefly modern, by an allowance of pause-feet, feet of no syllables at all, but where "silence invades the ear" (it is interesting to remember that there were fools who laughed at the phrase, when Dryden originally used it in another sense) with a more than sufficient mark of time in its step. In other words, while the presence of a syllable that you cannot account for seems to me sufficient proof that your system of accounting is wrong, the absence of one need, in the proper places and in them only, cause no difficulty at all. But the other measures need taking one by one.

Of the pyrrhic or double-short foot I find no instance, nor any desirableness, in any example of English poetry that has come under my cognisance. The belief in it, where it exists, can, I think, only come from inability—or intelligent, but I venture to think mistaken, refusal—to recognise the doctrine of common syllables which I have propounded above. Of course if anybody,

adopting the wrong theory (as it seems to me) of quantity, insists that "mother" cannot be a trochee—I myself (though it is Spenser who is the delinquent in his "versing" days) am prepared to say that it cannot, except in the most extraordinary circumstances, become an iamb or a spondee—if anybody says that "quantity" itself cannot be a cretic as well as a dactyl, I have nothing more to say. I simply have no need of the pyrrhichian hypothesis.

Of the iamb and trochee it were superfluous to speak at length, for everybody, who has not a special prize to fight, admits the former as the ruling constituent of English verse, and the latter as an important and most valuable alternative. Those who deny, deny on the previous question, on one of those theories of the constitutive principles of "longs" and "shorts" with which, as I have said from the beginning, I decline to have anything whatever to do. It is enough for me that their own terminology, transposed into mine by the justest equivalence, becomes simple "iamb" and "trochee" after all.

With the spondee it is a little different. It has been denied admission, not merely on the *a priori* and quite untenable ground that two accents cannot come together, but on alleged evidence of a less arbitrary kind. For myself I do not think that it is, especially in Early English, a very frequent foot; but I am quite sure that it exists, in ordinary pronunciation, outside of verse, and that it has been utilised, in verse itself and for verse purposes, by unquestioned authorities. In our special period, however, it is certainly not common. Even Spenser, whose slow and often solemn music might, it seems, specially invite its aid, is not lavish of it, though nobody can open, say, the *Four Hymns*, without finding examples enough to show its existence.

It is, however, with the trisyllabic feet that there may be most difficulty. The tribrach is a well-known bone of contention. I am certain that it has existed in English *de facto*, as it always might have *de jure*, since the sixteenth century, though it was probably not till the nineteenth that it was much used deliberately. I do not think that in the time of this volume it is often (if it is ever) to be found. And why? There is no difficulty in answering that question. The tribrach is the crowning secret, the *botte de Jésuite*, of the blank-verseman; and blank verse in our time was only beginning, and was practised with the gingerly correctness of beginners. In decasyllabic *stanzas* all trisyllabic feet are, as has been said, things to be used sparingly, lest they upset the symphony. The octosyllabic couplet is too unsubstantial a structure to spare one of its main supports, the long syllables: while the ballad measure absolutely requires them (though it is

not unsubstantial or fragile at all) for other reasons. It has had them from the first: they were bone of its bone in the fourteener, its father, and the old alliterative stave, its grandfather or great-grandfather. And it wants them: they are the springs with which it makes its efforts, and the spring-boards on which it takes its leaps and flights. But the blank-verse decasyllable, and the decasyllabic couplet, are at once full enough of resources in themselves, and (admirably as they can combine) independent enough of their neighbours, to stand the resolution of a single, or even more than a single, one of their joints into a lighter and livelier constituent.

The tribrach's opposite, the molossus or three-long foot, does not come in with us at all. Even in classical prosody it was very little used in verse—it is in fact practically a quadrisyllabic foot, and would, in English, break up if attempted.

The anapæst, on the other hand, is, with the iamb, the foot-of-all-work of English prosody. It makes its appearance as soon as trisyllabic equivalence is allowed, that is to say, practically at once. It is omnipresent in metre—almost every English foot of its length is actually, constructively, or colourably an anapæst. It substitutes itself quietly for the trochee as giving the dominating rhythm to the revived alliterative. And, as we have seen, and shall see over and over again, it actually disputes (in quite a friendly way) the position of base-foot with the iamb in some of the commonest and not the least attractive of English metrical schemes. While I, at least, have no doubt that it plays Jacob to the dactyl's Esau in nearly all tolerable English hexameters and not a few other schemes.

But the dactyl itself? Here certainly is a rub. An extremely large number of individual English words seem to be dactyls of the most unimpeachable kind, not merely such as "suddenly" or "carpenter" (that old crux!), but "Margaret," "carcanet," "trumpery," hundreds of others as genuine as you shall find in searching your gradus from morn to eve. Yet Campion himself notoriously doubted about the English dactyl as a constituent of metre. I have, for my humble part, no doubt about it at all. Do what it will, can, and may, it always, in continuous English verse, finds itself "tipping up" and becoming anapæstic with anacrusis.[1] I do not know why; and though it would not cost me five minutes to turn the statement of the fact into a jargonish explanation thereof on principles very popular to-day, I decline to do anything of the kind. The English language is made so,

[1] O|ver the mount|ain aloft | ran a rush | and a roll | and a roar|ing.
Kingsley's *Andromeda*.

And evreywhere where the line is a good line.

and I accept the fact. At most by a *tour de force*, and in small doses, the dactyl can evade its doom.

Of all the others there is only one that requires discussion. That no English feet with two long syllables—cretic, bacchic, antibacchic—exist, I am sure; the supposed necessity of them is only due either to a mistaken division,[1] or to a fresh exhibition of the same mistake about common syllables which was noticed under "pyrrhic." But the amphibrach cannot be quite so cavalierly dismissed. Here there is no *prima facie* disqualification on the law just laid down, for there are not two long syllables in it. And it constantly "appears to appear" in actual use. Even at this early period I have had the opportunity (and the honesty) to specify some of these appearances, and I shall endeavour to keep up the practice, even unto Byron's

˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘
The black bands | came over,

and to Mr. Browning's

˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘
How | my heart leaps | but hearts, af|ter leaps, ache.

The fact is that the amphibrach is a clever foot, but I do not (in English) believe in the amphibrach. The only safe and philosophical rule in prosody, as in other things, is not to multiply your entities beyond necessity; and I do not believe that the amphibrach (much less the antibacchic which some would use in these cases) is ever necessary. Here also the anapæst—that Abra of English, who comes when you call her rival, and is ready before even that rival is called—is equal to the occasion. Every apparently amphibrachic line and phrase in English can be, I believe, and should be, scanned anapæstically, with or without anacrusis, or even with the ordinary substitution.

And so this will leave us with the iamb and the anapæst for constant use, the trochee for frequent, the spondee and the tribrach for less frequent but by no means sparing, and the dactyl in a sort of questionable position on the threshold, not quite ghostly. 'Twill serve, and something more than serve, when we remember that Gascoigne would have left us with the iamb alone, and Bysshe with the iamb, *plus* the anapæst "kept in the scullery" like Cinderella.

– ˘ – – ˘ –

[1] Thus Moore's "shi|ning on | shi|ning on," which annoyed Guest so much, is neither a pair of bad anapæsts nor a pair of good cretics, but four feet, two of them monosyllabic.

APPENDIX VI

ENGLISH METRES—1200-1600

THERE may appear to be something superfluous, or even unreasonable, in the title and matter of this Appendix. The whole volume, so far as its writer could and would, has been a history of English metres, *plus* those measures which are not metrical, or not wholly metrical. "Why add anything," it may be said, "except as a confession of insufficiency?"

I add it partly for the same reason for which I have added all the others—in order to take new points of grouping and summary-view; partly for another and specific purpose, which may be dealt with first.

It must have been noticed—I have drawn attention to the fact myself more than once or twice—that little attention has been paid to the supposed or possible *origin* of particular metres, in so far as that origin is to be found in parallel examples from other languages. This has been done deliberately. I am well aware that you may find something very like the fifteener-fourteener in Greek from one point of view, and in early Latin from another as well as the same. I have been perfectly familiar for very many years with the multiple examples in Old French, which the poets of our earliest time must or may have had before them. I am not so familiar with Provençal, but I could discover or verify origins there with little trouble. And so with others. Only, is the affiliation worth making? Is it even a just *affiliation* at all? I do not think it is even the first, except as an interesting but, for my special purpose, superfluous pastime. I have said that every language has the prosody it deserves; and so has every family of languages, using family not in the bare scientific sense, but in the sense in which members of a family show resemblances of manner with, and borrow tricks and phrases from, each other. If apparent imitation and derivation are to have such weight, how are we to account for the things that were *not* imitated and derived? Not only were the twelfth and thirteenth centuries thoroughly familiar with the Latin hexameter and elegiac, but they actually produced,

as all mediæval scholars know, vast quantities of them, sometimes by no means despicable, even from the classical standpoint. Why were these not imitated in the vernacular? Again, French, the other great study, had produced, and was producing, millions of Alexandrines. Why is the continuous Alexandrine one of the rarest things in English literature?

No! no! We imitate in prosody (as in other things, but much more than in other things) only what we are beforehand disposed and qualified to produce without imitation. It is suggestion at most that these foreign or ancient patterns give; the English matter develops itself *à la grâce Dieu* in the English way. A comparative history of European or Indo-Germanic (or, as that is old, whatever is the latest catchword) Prosody might not be uninteresting; but I do not feel any call to write it, more particularly as I know somebody who could write it much better. One may glance in that direction now and then, but the glance is enough.

So, too, I feel no temptation to enumerate, classify, and schedule every possible combination of feet and lines, or every actual instance of the kind. The first task is clearly endless. Guest allowed 1296 varieties of his "verse of five accents" alone; add the possibilities of the others, and cumulate them with permutations of the lines in stanzas, and it requires no great depth in arithmetic to see that you will get into billions and more. As for the actual forms, Dr. Schipper's unhasting, unresting diligence has not exhausted them. It is, in fact, critically as well as arithmetically, impossible.

There are, however, certain prevalent and pre-eminent forms which, though they have been pretty fully dealt with at intervals, and by their most remarkable examples, in the text, may require a few words to summarise their position during the period. These are the octosyllabic couplet; the "fourteener" and its resolutions; the Romance-six or *rime couée*; the decasyllabic couplet; the larger stanzas, from rhyme-royal to Spenserian; and, at our time, on an at least possibly different footing from these, but still important, the anapæstic dimeter. Blank verse is in its infancy, and others are hardly that.

The octosyllabic couplet is the oldest complete metrical form that we find in English, and has held ground with comparatively little alteration to the present day, from the time of Layamon certainly in the strict form, and of *Genesis and Exodus* certainly (with earlier possibilities) in the equivalenced, but in the latter case with long intermissions. Its extreme simplicity and (up to a certain point) ease, on the one hand; the immense body of it in the French materials of translation, on the other, had

no doubt much to do with this. But I have always regarded it myself, from its presence in Layamon, and from the nature of the case, as being really a resolution into metre of the old alliterative couplet, and so an alternative to the fourteener itself. Between the two I should put the definite *fif*teener of Orm, which may be as well taken for a catalectic variety of the couplet as for a hypercatalectic variety of the long verse, and which certainly seems to me to have different *cadence*, though it may not have a different number of syllables, from the hypercatalectic lines of Robert of Gloucester, or even those of the *Moral Ode*. I can imagine a man saying to himself (only that I must once more warn the reader that I do not believe any one consciously said it), "Let us get this old alliterated stuff into some metrical form," and doing it, in some such a thing as these couplets, of which he had read so many in French romances and in Latin hymns.

But I can also imagine himself saying to himself in the same unconscious manner, "Could we not vary this monotony a little? Does not the old line show a slight tendency to shorten itself in its second half, and will not this make an agreeable variety? And do I not, moreover, see something like it in those hymns they sing, where the minor line aids or is aided by the music to make an agreeable sort of feminine partner to the major?" And then he goes and does it: he produces the fourteener or half ballad-metre line. When he has done this for some time he notices the tendency to split up, and thinks another rhyme would be prettier still, and he goes and does that too. I no more believe that all this was deliberately thought of than I believe that a baby thinks, "If I open my mouth, somebody will perhaps put something into it"; but I believe the process is fairly analogical. And if anybody says, "What have we to do with your imaginations and beliefs?" I reply, "Nothing; but you have a great deal to do with Layamon and with the *Moral Poet*."

The history, however, of these two first products of the imposition of mould on matter was very different. When the octosyllable had taken its two great forms of equivalence and unequivalence, there was nothing much more to do with it than to polish it, and develop its not very numerous or various varieties. Chaucer and Gower did this in their different ways for the stricter form, probably to the extent which the capacities of Middle English permitted, while hardly any one of real poetic genius (except Spenser in passing) attempted the looser. The further possibilities of both lie before us, and are not for treatment here.

But the fourteener, of which even more has been said in the text, had much more fermenting power in it, and was to pass

through numerous and remarkable stages, even in these four hundred years, leaving plenty for the future as well. As a single and solid form it acquired finish, without losing vigour, constantly, from its first extensive utterance by Robert of Gloucester to that hardy vying by Chapman with the hexameter of Homer itself, to which we have almost come, and to the less apparently rash, but really more impossible, challenge of Virgil and Ovid by Phaer and Golding in an earlier generation, to which we have come actually. It fused itself into the ballad-metre and the poulter's measure. It "sprouted" something that was more "shady" than "a boon" for the simple sheep of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, in the shape of the longer doggerel. And in a moment we shall have to consider it, not exactly as in competition with the decasyllable and the anapæstic dimeter, but as in a sort of inextricable embrace with them, and even with the equivalenced octosyllable itself.

The Romance-six or *rime couée* has also been pretty fully dealt with. Although it probably, with the octosyllable, is the vehicle of most longer Middle English poems in metre, it is not really a very good vehicle for such purposes, though often very beautiful "simple of itself," or in composition for shorter pieces, or as a change. It is as much liable to sing-song as the couplet or the common measure themselves, though not quite so much perhaps as the "poulter's"; and while it breaks the rhythm of thought and imagery, as all stanzas more or less do, it has not room and verge enough to "vignette" single features sufficiently.[1]

Of the decasyllable, coupleted or single, there is again little to be said in addition to the remarks that have been made on its sporadic appearance before Chaucer, on its thorough regimenting by Chaucer, on its disorganisation in the hands of his followers, on the painful efforts made to bring it back to order by Wyatt and Surrey, on its complete or nearly complete reorganisation by Spenser for rhymed forms, and on its something more than improvement for unrhymed ones by the Marlowe group. Spenser did with it what he pleased, as the fraction, or rather member, of a stanza, and little less as a demi-couplet (his only "blanks," *vide supra*, are but curiosities). But his use of it, with that of the dramatists, was quite sufficient to start the all-important practice of the two forms by the poets of the seventeenth century. In fact, as I have said, Chaucer had given quite sufficient indication of its powers, both for stopped and enjambed couplet, with the language at his command.

[1] It is fair to say that, except when Dunbar took it for the "Seven Deadly Sins," it was not very lucky. Chaucer laughed at it. Its practitioners (except Chester) had not much poetry in them as a rule, though you may find good bits in most romances, save *Torrent of Portugal*, and one or two more.

Of the larger stanzas, rhyme-royal in Chaucer's hands and the Spenserian in those of its creator, with the examples of the former by Sackville and Spenser again, left for successors a bare possibility of equalling—none of excelling. Between them the octave in its various forms had, in the hands of the two masters, given admirable work, and, in those of others, some occasional felicities. But I confess that it seems to me always something of a foreigner in English—a foreigner naturalised, welcome, bringing his good things with him, and adding to the national wealth, but still not absolutely autochthonous or even "old-landed." Perhaps it is for this reason that it lends itself so admirably to burlesque. It is at any rate noteworthy—and it comes in as a support to my theory as to the limited effects of mere imitation—that Chaucer, and still more Spenser, with the vast amount of Italian *ottava* before them, used this actual form so little. Further, it may be desirable to add to what has been said before on the Spenserian, that I do not think its characteristics can be satisfactorily accounted for by considering the octave alone in any form—*Monk's Tale* or other—or by comparing the arrangement of Spenser's own *Amoretti*, in its octave, or in any such way. It is εὕρημά τι Μοισᾶν—a thing of itself born whole and complete—after floating suggestings, perhaps, from everything below it—*Cuckoo and Nightingale* quintet, sixain, rhyme-royal and other septets, octaves of all sorts — but essentially *born*, not made to pattern.

The most difficult, though at the same time the most interesting, of all the skeins into which we have to wind our scattered threads, is the last. There are, in every part of our period I think, in the last part of it beyond all doubt, a very large number of lines, and a not small number of complete pieces, as to the prosodic designation of which, and not merely that (for as I have shown above it is often a mere "matter of account"), but as to their radical and basic constituents, there may be serious questions. I have indicated this, without exactly attempting to discuss it, repeatedly in connection with the broken-down decasyllables of the Chaucerians, with the ballad-metre, with the various doggerels, with the metre of Spenser's *February*, etc., and lastly, with the anapæstic dimeter, which sometimes separates itself, with absolute clearness to the ear, from the others, and sometimes lurks among them, or changes places with them, in a somewhat bewildering manner. There exists on this verse, and its possible relations with the Spanish *arte mayor*, a prosodic monograph,[1] already mentioned, and one of the most remark-

[1] *Analogies between English and Spanish Verse* (*Arte Mayor*). By W. P. Ker (Philological Society's *Transactions*, 1898-99).

able with which I am acquainted; so to it I refer readers who are anxious to acquaint themselves with the comparative part of the subject. It is not out of keeping with my theories that, in most countries, the settling down of the more fantastic and irregular verse of the Middle Ages, under the influence of the regular and classical models of the Renaissance, should have caused an effervescence of this kind. I should, however—while admitting, as I have already admitted, the scuffle which takes place between all the metres that I have enumerated above, and admitting further (as I have said in the text) that in the worst times people really did not know exactly at what metre they were aiming—maintain that, on the whole, determination towards a fresh classification is visible. Perhaps the clearing up was helped by music; perhaps not.[1] But, judging by ear, I have no doubt that Spenser's metre,[2] though heavily and unduly *anapæsted*, is not *anapæstic* but iambic in basis, and that the development of the pure anapæst, as in the metre of Tusser, though it may trace some suggestion to

Fumus et mulier et stillicidia,

with that change from dactyl to anapæst which has been noted on "Feet"—though we may find scattered examples of something like it from the Lewes poem to Tusser himself—is a new thing. And, anticipating a little, I should say also that its popular employment during the seventeenth century was a quite natural result, by reaction, of the stiffening of the literary metres in octosyllable and decasyllable alike, by development, in relation to their "enjambed" varieties. But of this hereafter.[3]

[1] The pointed mention of tunes in all but the earliest Miscellanies is for it.

[2] In the crucial part of "The Oak and the Brere," that is to say. In the earlier part of *February*, and in most of *May* and *September*, the anapæstic basis can hardly be denied, though there are not merely scattered octosyllables and decasyllables, but solid blocks of both.

[3] In the "hereafter," too, it may be possible, if readers really desire it, to devote an Appendix to a brief survey of the older metres in other tongues which are referred to above.

APPENDIX VII

PAUSE IN ENGLISH—1200-1600

Pause in English, like alliteration, is of two kinds, which we will not call the false and the true, but might justly call the rudimentary and the accomplished. Rudimentary pause—pause at or near the middle of the line—shows itself, in fact is dominant, in Anglo-Saxon; and not merely Guest, but some people who are quite impatient at even hearing of Guest, would like to keep it, if not dominant, yet in a position approaching dominance. It is a natural and useful assistance in communicating some prosodic effect—in serving as prosodic go-cart to the infant. But go-carts are not only superfluous when people can use their limbs, they are a very considerable hindrance to that use. Accomplished pause has nothing necessarily to do with the middle; though it may have been suggested by the other.

We might even go so far as to say that it is treating Anglo-Saxon very unfairly to speak of the middle line of demarcation (which is so marked in both senses that it was the first thing actually to suggest that there *was* Anglo-Saxon poetry) as a pause at all. It is really a line-separation, and ceased to have any reason of existence when the long verse-chains of our "grandam gold" broke themselves up. There are, of course, other pauses, in the sections of these chains, which better deserve the name, but we need take no keep of them here.

To adopt our usual scheme, the ideal "poet of 1200"—impossible but useful eidolon!—had this sharp division before him; and he must evidently have endeavoured to maintain it in the nearest equivalents of the old line, while in shorter forms the line construction did this for him. In regard to these shorter lines themselves, he had Latin with definite cæsuras which might not, and French with definite cæsuras which could not, escape him. But he also had the quality of English—that quality of which the late Mr. Lowell used to say, when people were impertinent enough to ask him where he got his good diction and accent—

I gat it in my mither's wame,
Where ye'll get never none !

Latin may have wanted the settled cæsura, or have borrowed it *simpliciter* from Greek; French certainly wants it, owing to its *atony*, though, in the octosyllable, even French gave it up ere long. English does not; and not needing the stick merely to support itself, it can use that stick to beat time with, and to describe pleasant forms in the air. If we turn up our inestimable Layamon we shall find that, in his numerous rhyming couplets, he does not trouble himself about middle cæsura at all. The *Owl and the Nightingale* man has them often, but often also not. He of the *Cursor Mundi* (I have just taken down a volume and dipped in all directions to make sure) is equally nonchalant; so that Guest really need not have been so hard on Milton. The romancers are rather more careful, as one might expect from men who are actually translating French; and Chaucer and Gower prefer the middle, though the former does not scruple to overrun it, and Gower does so sometimes.

The superstition of the strict or rudimentary middle pause, therefore, can hardly be said to prevail during our period in the octosyllable, and that of the tetremimeral cæsura in the decasyllable could not, for the first half of it. We observed that it had come in for practice with Blind Harry in Scots; and we know that Gascoigne had got it in his head before our period ceases, though with indulgence as to rhyme-royal. On the other hand, we can hardly expect, and we do not find, that the accomplished pause has many devotees. It could not, with the exceptions of the Two Masters; and even they, as they never used blank verse (*exc. exc.*), had no opportunity to try it where its powers are greatest and its aid most required.

Chaucer, of course, makes real use of the pause—a "pause-chart" of any page of the *Canterbury Tales* would show a right cunning and agreeable zigzag of tallies—but he is rather apt to provide a kind of compensation-pause, as well, in the regular place. It was characteristic of him to do so, and the language was hardly yet rich enough to give him Shakespeare's chances. But his practice in rhyme-royal established that salutary "Hands off!" to the arbitrary law which Gascoigne transmits to us, and itself transmitted to Sackville the art of running the real pause of sense and voice beyond, or short of, the fourth syllable, even when you actually let a word end with this.

But Spenser, here also, has gone the farthest. The couplets of *Mother Hubberd* are a good study for this purpose; the miscellaneous stanzas and the two great Odes likewise. But, as I think I have already said, the management of the pause, in the

Spenserian itself, was one of the greatest secrets, or rather devices, of his art. The pause-curves, or crevasse-zigzags, of any succession of Spenserian stanzas, will show almost better than anything else why it is that the individual stanza is never monotonous, and yet the whole is perfectly symphonied.

When Shakespeare and Milton had divined this, and had applied it to the blank-verse paragraph, there was little more for English prosody to do in a certain direction. But the great reign of Pause—the period when it can show itself anywhere in the line, or withdraw itself therefrom altogether, when it is the very magician's wand of the poet—is, except in Spenser, and even in him, hardly with us so far.

APPENDIX VIII

RHYME—1200-1600

THE question of the origin of Rhyme, and of its history previous to its appearance in English, is one of those—in the other sense previous—to which we do not pay much attention here. Except for the attraction referred to in the famous phrase, "The beauty of it is that you never *can* find it out," there is indeed little reason why any one should trouble himself on the first point, for there is no available evidence. Rhyme occurs sporadically in many languages at many times: regularly perhaps in no European language at any time until the Dark or Early Middle Ages. The *fons* in the latter case has been much discussed. There used to be a tendency to think it German, but it is now almost enough to say that we have no very early rhymed Teutonic verse,[1] and that the Teutonic verse which most nearly concerns this particular enquiry is conspicuously, and obstinately, unrhymed. A claim, as usual, has since been set up for Celtic; but the most liberal of competent Celticists agree, I believe, that the oldest rhymed Celtic poetry that we actually have—that in Irish—*may*, and probably does, derive its rhyme from Latin. With this last, therefore, we are left, but preferably with its middle and lower forms, when the old Italic elements, deriving some occult reinforcement from the "barbarian" novelties, with which in so many different shapes they were confronted, broke through the spell of superinduced Greek metrification. As for the consideration of "the natural tendency of the ear to be pleased with the recurrence of the same sound," etc. etc., the lover of such formulas may frame and follow them as fast and as far as he pleases, unhindered, if also unheeded, by me.

What we have to do with here is the appearance of rhyme *in English poetry* proper. Of its appearance, which is mainly a non-appearance, in that older English poetry with which we do not here specially deal, something has been said in the text. It

[1] Unless anybody believes in "Herman—sla lerman," etc., in which case I am his very humble servant.

is enough to repeat here that our typical "poet of 1200," supposing him to have had a complete library of Anglo-Saxon verse before him, would, if the proportions and phenomena followed those of the shelf-ful that we still possess, have found very few examples of rhyme at all, and those few either unimportant, like the scraps in the Chronicle, or "palpable-gross" imitations and exaggerations like the *Rhyming Poem*. On the other hand, the poet of 1300, looking at contemporary *English* poetry, would, unless he came across some of the lost (and probably mythical) intermediate ancestors of the Alliterative Revival, find it *all* rhymed, with less or more elaboration.

The lesson of these two facts should be unmistakable, but the phenomena between them may deserve a little examination. Putting together the no-rhyme in Orm, the intermittent rhyme in Layamon, the snatches and patches of it in the Godric fragments, the Canute poem, the *Proverbs of Alfred*, etc., we see a *determination* towards it, though perhaps less in the North than in the South. And I cannot see any way out of the conclusion that this determination was due, partly to the influence of the Latin hymns, partly to that of French poetry, which had itself abandoned assonance for rhyme. Guest's remark about no nation having ever adopted accentual scansion without also accepting rhyme, though there is a certain amount of truth in it, or rather though it has a certain amount of connection with truth, is unlucky.[1] For Old English, the scansion of which *was* purely accentual, managed to do without rhyme for hundreds of years certainly, and probably for hundreds more before these; while Middle English adopted rhyme at precisely the same moment as that at which it ceased to scan by accentuation merely, and acquired a system of foot- or space-correspondence. It might be safer to put it that a language with a large number of common syllables, or one in which the quantity of syllables is most frequently determined *pro hac vice*, finds rhyme a great convenience at least. In French, where there is practically no quantity at all, rhyme has proved not a convenience but a necessity.

For the earliest ages of English poetry, however, it seemed as if it were, and were to be, neither the one nor the other. Anglo-Saxon, until its latest stages, is practically "rhyme-proof," and even when those latest stages are reached, such a thing as the famous *Rhyming Poem*, whether imitated from Norse or not, is an exception which proves the rule in the strictly vernacular as well as the corrected and more learned sense. The exaggeration

[1] I have admitted above that he may have been thinking merely of "head-rhyme," *i.e.* "*not*-rhyme."

of the thing shows how unfamiliar and exotic it is: the decoration is worn, as the savage wears civilised finery, with a clumsy and tasteless extravagance. No particular good—indeed little good at all—would come of such a thing as this, though traces of the same influence may be found in later matters such as the

Bullock sterteth, bucke verteth,

of "Sumer is icumen in," with its quickly and smartly redoubled internal rhyme.

Very different—very much more wholesome—and of far greater interest and promise, is the reappearance of rhyme in Layamon, with the corresponding phenomena in the *Proverbs of Alfred*, and even to a small extent in the Godric fragments. That the French practice in the octosyllabic couplet has more than a great deal to do with it, is as certain as a similar connection between Scandinavian practice and the *Rhyming Poem* is probable. But this, while it adds a little to the extraneous interest, does not in the least detract from the genuine and intrinsic importance of the symptom. So, too, as has been pointed out in the text, with regard to the irregularity of the appearance of the couplet itself from the point of view of metre, the irregularity of the appearance of rhyme is of immense value from the point of view of rhyme itself. Here is no unnatural dead-lift, but a steady *nisus*, now attaining, now failing, but sure to attain in time. Here is no freak, no accident, but a real symptom, invaluable for diagnosis and prognosis alike. The very fact that the rhyming words are the simplest and most familiar, not the far-fetched eccentricities—almost *voces nihili* in some cases it seems—of the *Rhyming Poem*, is one of the most striking and one of the best of these symptoms. For these form an obvious *nucleus*—the rhyming dictionary will never lose them, and will certainly add to them. Whereas outlandishnesses like those of the *Rhyming Poem*, or those far later alliterations of Gavin Douglas's in the Eighth Prologue, have no vital, no exemplary power, and merely indicate the spasms of false birth or of approaching and real death. Nothing can be falser than the notion, actually if not explicitly encouraged by Guest, and more or less countenanced by those who, if not whole-heartedly, follow him, that true rhyme, as an incident of the "rhythm of the foreigner," had a denationalising and denaturalising influence on English prosody. Two remarkable facts disprove this notion, of themselves and completely. The first is the fact that the freer and more strictly English octosyllabics, and the fourteeners of Robert and the others, admit rhyme just as gladly as the more Gallicised movements—seem, indeed, specially to rejoice in

it, and use its pivoting and "spring-board" facilities as the means to ballad-metre and other intensely English things. The other, more temporary and merely curious, but very curious and historically all-important, is the fact that resuscitated alliteration, as we have seen, cannot resist the charms of rhyme, and succumbs to them. A singular thing, surely, if the legitimate wife should thus make friends with the adulteress!

The varieties and incidents of Rhyme during our four centuries are numerous and interesting. Rhyme-schemes of particular poets would, indeed, be of little use unless we had those poets' own MSS., and would be, in the main, little more than curiosities then, except in a case like Chaucer's. A general view is less likely to err, and more profitable. We find, of course, that the use of the stock easy obvious rhymes just referred to becomes rather a danger, especially in the case of the octosyllable, where rhymes are so frequently needed. We find also, as a matter of course, that this same temptation encourages in the feebler versers—and sometimes not only in them—the use not merely of words of meaning like "king," "thing," "brother," "other," "wife," "life," etc., but of words which have no real meaning at all—of the abominable expletives "sikerly," "verament," and the like. The yet further temptations to eclectic or positively tormented accent, to confusion of suffix-rhyming and rhyming on main syllables, etc., have been already dwelt on. And we have seen how the internal rhyme, the double rhyme, and other sub-varieties, have already presented their aid to the poet, and how he has sometimes profited by them, and sometimes used them to his hurt and their abuse. In fact, the decadence of rhyme, in the Time of Staggers, is almost as remarkable as the decadence of rhythm, and shows the intimate connection between the two in poetry.

On the other, and better, hand, nothing shows this same connection and its happy effect on poetry itself better than the revival of rhyme-effect to some extent in Wyatt and Surrey (much affected as they still are by the disease), to more in Sackville and the better Elizabethan primitives, to most in Spenser. From being at worst a series of irregular detonations, at best a sort of type-writer bell announcing that a certain number of words or syllables have gone before, Rhyme recovers, and more than recovers, its proper place as Moderatress of Harmony within line and line-group, and as bestower of wonderful additional graces from without, that fill the air around and about the syllabic structure. Sackville especially shows himself a great rhyme-master in his single scheme; but here also Spenser easily keeps his place, not in a single scheme, but in many. His fixed

idea that rhyme must be perfect, to the eye as well as to the ear, does not always improve the look of the verse; and has no doubt increased the popular notion as to the eccentric and almost rococo character of his diction. Yet this very idea is, in its way, a counsel of rhyming perfection. Rhythm and rhyme are so thoroughly married in the *Faerie Queene* that the marriage is indissoluble—the rhythm seems to be wholly prepared for the rhyme, the rhyme to carry out exactly, and add exactly what is wanted by, the rhythm. There is plenty to come still—the miraculous rhyme-conjuring of the playwright songsters and minor Caroline lyrists; the audacious mastery with which Milton casts a rhyme to the winds, sure that they will bring it back to him at the right moment; even the less poetical and more rhetorical cunning of the stopped heroic couplet, and the mazes of the enjambed one, not to speak of things later still. But we are here principally concerned with the fact that, throughout all changes of time and language—in spite of the Alliterative Rebellion, in spite of the deliquescence, almost, of pronunciation, in spite, finally, of the extraordinary paralogisms based, in our latest times, on the practice of the classical poetries—Rhyme holds her own, holds it easily, constantly, in spite alike of the strength of some of her foes (for Langland is not exactly a Jack Straw) and the weakness of not a few of her servants and practitioners. Even Blank Verse—the new apparent rival of which we have said something, but not much—will turn out to be no rival at all, only an auxiliary differently armed, and fitted to subdue countries where Rhyme is less at ease and less at home.

APPENDIX IX

VOWEL-MUSIC—1200-1600

THE above title introduces a separate though short Appendix here, because, though there is not very much to be said on it in the present volume, I wish to make these appendices more or less uniform, and there should be a great deal to be said under it later. Nor is the matter one for complete silence here.

I mean by "vowel-music" that special charm of poetry which, without exactly attempting the old prosaic "suiting of the sound to the sense"—the *r* to the dog and the *s* to the snake, and so on—attempts to add a sort of musical accompaniment, in poetical, not musical, music, to the sense, and to the mere lexicon-sounds themselves. This music is almost prodigally and excessively lavished in Italian, so that its promiscuity makes it, save in the hands of the greatest poets, all but valueless as a distinction. It is perhaps rarest in French of all languages ancient and modern.[1] It is at its absolute perfection in Greek; very great in Latin (especially Low Latin) and Spanish.[2] In the Teutonic tongues, at least in English, it can vie with Greek at its best, but is often vilely neglected or *mis*played. From Spenser and Shakespeare downwards all the great poets have used it, and no doubt consciously; but its period of constant and deliberate employment, by poets in general, hardly dates farther back than Keats, one of the shells of whose special *murex* it was.

In our time we cannot expect very much of it because of the experimental and imperfect state of the language. There is relatively much more, and positively much, in Anglo-Saxon, which

[1] That is, in modern French; it is abundant in the older language. Even since the Renaissance, and without including the Pléiade, who were masters of it, it can be found. Victor Hugo's exceptional possession of its secret is his great glory. Agrippa d'Aubigné, the Père Lemoyne, Baudelaire, Verlaine, know it well. But it hardly shows at all in the average poetry of 1600-1800; and the Romantics did not always find it. Even the wonderful charm of Musset's "À Saint-Blaise" and "L'Andalouse" is due rather to rhythm than to strict vowel-music.

[2] Provençal no doubt has it. But why did the Provençals *spell* so badly? Except the Dutch, they seem to me the chief sinners in that way.

had perfected its own means, if they were not great. But we get flashes and scraps of it not seldom as we go in Middle English—the line, for instance, quoted above from a miracle-play—

The land of vision is full far,

derives at least part of its exceptional beauty from the way in which, after a run of short or blunt vowels, the last "far" breaks and scatters light and sound like a rocket at its culmination. Chaucer could not miss it. Once more the old favourite—

That all the orient laugheth of the light,

owes in its turn not a little to the three great contrasted *o-a-i* sounds used at the strong places of the line. So does the

Swerd of winter keen and cold

of the *Squire's Tale* to the shuddering *ee*'s and *oo*'s of its last longs. He knew what he was doing in bringing *O alma Redemptoris* into the *Prioress's Tale*, and in writing a hundred places of *Troilus*. But the aid of vowel-music is specially (though by no means exclusively) valuable in the more serious and passionate verse; and from this, as everybody knows, he more and more drew away.

You cannot be thinking of your vowels (even if you had ears to hear) when you are praying to all the saints in Christendom to get you safely over a certain number of syllables, and are not being very well heard by them. So that we get little[1] of this music in the English Chaucerians, while the abundance of broad sound, and the prevalence of aureate language, make it commoner (in both senses) in Scots.[2] But the ballad gives excellent openings for it; only it must not be of too elaborate a kind there. And with Sackville and Spenser it once more comes into great and admirable use. Sackville's fine picture of Hell owes a great deal to it, and it is one of the many souls that can be drawn out of the weaver of the *Faerie Queene*. In the first it was probably instinctive; in the last I can hardly think it so. There never was a more deliberate, as perhaps there never was a greater, poetical artist than Spenser; and he too must have known what he was doing. All over the *Faerie Queene*—on every page as you open it at random—there is the light and colour which this very music of which we are speaking, and that music alone, can spread.[3] I

[1] It is feeble even when it occurs, as in Lydgate's "seven best lines" (as Miss Kitty would say), on p. 231.

[2] Dunbar and Alexander Scott seem to me to have the most command of it.

[3] I hardly know a more unhappy phrase than the often-quoted "Spenserian vowels that *elope with ease*"—like Lydia Bennet!

take my usual *sortes* and open straight (in the least generally studied of the Books, and in an edition in which I have never specially studied that Book, though I have in others) on the following—VI. vi. ii. 6—

Wasting the strength of her immortal age.

It is not a capital example at first sight; not of the most beautiful and appealing. But observe the way in which, after the inserted *e* and *o* (the *i* between is little more than an interval) the *a* recurs —the circle of eternity symbolises itself in the completion of the music. These are the things on which it seems to me unnecessary—almost profane—to insist; but which may be at least brought to the notice of those who may be stimulated to follow them out for themselves, and make them their own. It is in this way that the study of prosody and of literature justifies itself—in this that it should be pursued. And I shall think myself sufficiently fortunate if I am permitted to continue the suggestion, and to supply the facts, which might perhaps otherwise escape those who have not had, and may never have, time for the independent discovery of them.

INDEX

INDEX

(Only names of poets, prosodists, etc., concerned with the work noticed in this volume are dated.)

A B C, Chaucer's, 148
Accent and quantity, 4, 5, App. II.
Adamson, Patrick, Sempill on, 278
Adonais, 366
Ælfric, 102
Æneid (G. Douglas's), *The*, 276 *sq.*
Alamanni, 311 *note*
Aldred, Curse of, 28, 29 *note*
Alexander poems, the alliterative, 186, 187
Alexander and Dindimus, 187
Alexander the Great (Scots), 287
Alexandrines, 53, 113, 133, 135, 174, and *passim* later
Alfred, Proverbs of. See *Proverbs*
Alison, 116 *sq.*, 398
Alliteration and alliterative verse, Bk. II. Chaps. II. and V.; Bk. III. Chap. IV.; Interchaps. III. and IV. *passim*; App. IV.
Amoretti, 361
Amoryus and Cleopes, 264 *note*
Amours, Mr., 107 *note*, 111 *note*
Andromeda, 402 *note*
Anglo-Saxon prosody, 6, 12-14, 61, 66, 180, 248
Annelida and Arcite, 154
Arber, Mr., 235 *note*, 323
Arnold, Mr. M., 5, 85
Arnold's *Chronicle*, 258
Arraignment of Paris, The, 348
Arte Mayor, 374 *note*, 408
Ascham, Roger (1515-1568), 319
Assembly of Gods, The, 228 *sq.*
Assembly of Ladies, The, 178
Atterbury, 85
Aubigné, Agrippa d', 418 *note*
Auchinleck MS., the, 90 *sq.*, 144
Audelay, John (15th cent.), 264
Avowing of King Arthur, 96 *note*
Awntyrs of Arthur, The, 106
"Back and side, go bare, go bare 279, 295, 297
Bacon, 59
Bale, John (1495-1563), 336, 337, 341
Ballad of East and West, A, 67
Ballad measure, 32, 36, 68, Bk. III. Chap. III. *passim*
"Ballad Question," the, 246
"Ballad on St. Bartholomew," 278
Banville, 135
Barbour, John (1316?-1395), 265 *sq.*
Barclay, Alexander (1475?-1552) 234 240, 363 *note*, 374
Barham, 135
Baston, 113 and *note*
Battle of Alcazar, The, 347 *note*
Baudelaire, 19 *note*, 177, 418 *note*
Beattie, 365
Bede, 14
Belle Dame Sans Merci, La, 178
Bernard of Morlaix, 22
Beryn, Tale of, 178
Bestiary, The, 52-55
Blackburne MS., the, 96 *note*, 107 *note*
Blackmore, 393
"Blind Harry," 269
Boadicea, scansion of, 8, 9
"Bob" (a very short line interposed between the main body of a stanza and the "wheel" or coda), 95, and *passim* in Bks. II. and III.
Boccaccio, 145
Bokenam, Osbern (15th cent.), 264
Book of the Duchess, The, 151
Bradshaw, Mr., 145 *note*, 177
Brandl, Herr A., 335 *note*
Bridges, Mr. Robert, vii, 382
Browne, William, 138
Browning, Mr., 403
Brus, The, 267 *sq.*
Brut, The. *See* Layamon

Buke of the Howlat, The, 111 *note*
Bullen, Mr., 259 *note*
Burgh, Benedict (*fl. c.* 1472), 220, 264
"Burns stanza," the, 205 *sq.*
Butler, 393
Byron, 365, 403
Bysshe, 393, 403

"Cadence," 160 *note*, 391 *note*
Caedmon, 102
Calisto and Melibœa, 340
Cambyses, 342
Campion, 402
Canning, 393
Canterbury Tales, The, 161 *sq.*, 371
Canute Song, The, 29 *sq.*, 371
Carol, the great ("I sing of a maiden"), 243, 259 *sq.*, 398
Castle of Perseverance, The, 217, 337
Caxton, 275
Celtic, prosody of, 24
Chapman, 323, 407
Chaucer, Geoffrey (*c.* 1340-1400), 8, 10, 13, 89, 142-78, 196 *sq.*, Bk. III. Chap. II. *passim*, Interchap. III., 350 *sq.*, 373, 397
"Chauceriana," prosody of, 178
Cherry and the Slae, The, 282
"Chester" Plays, 203 *sq.*
Chester, Thomas (15th cent.), 263, 407 *note*
Chevy Chase, 251 *sq.*
Chivaler Assigne, 187 *note*
Christabel, 61, 63 *note*, 353, 357
Christ's Kirk on the Green, 280
Clanvowe, Sir Thomas (*fl. c.* 1390), 178
Clariodus, 287
Cleanness, 102 *sq.*, 181 *note*, 373
Coleridge, 61, 63, 91, 160, 174, 219-21, 354
Colin Clout's Come Home Again, 359
Collier, John Payne (1789-1883), 330 *note*, 336 *note*
Colvin, Mr. Ian, 391 *note*
Commodian, 17, 18, 241
"Common Syllables," App. II.
Complaint of Mars, 152
Complaint of Venus, 154
Complaint unto Pity, 149, 150
Confessio Amantis, The, 139-42
Conversion of Swearers, The, 236 *sq.*
Cosin, Bishop, 131
Couée [couwee], *Rime*, 93 *note*, 113
Courthope, Mr., vii, 4
Court of Love, The, 178, 374
"Coventry" Plays, 203 *sq.*
Craigie, Mr. W. A., 264 *note*
Crown of Laurel, The, 240 *sq.*
Cuckoo Song, The, 120 *note*
Cuckoo and the Nightingale, The, 178, 408
Cursor Mundi, The, 90, 101, 129, 411
Cynewulf, 102

Dame Siriz, 71
Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins, The, 273
Dante, 14 *note*, 145 *note*, 307 *note*
Daphnaida, 359
Decasyllable, the, 33 *note*, 36, 64 *note*, 132-5, 146, 161, and *passim* later
Deor, The Complaint of, 24, 108
Destruction of Troy, The, 186, 187
Digby Plays, the, 216
"Dimeter," etc., xvii, 169 *note*
Dirge on Edward IV., 245, 297
Dirge on Suffolk, 261
Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil, 132 *sq.*
Doggerel, 241 *sq.*, Interchaps. III. and IV., Bk. IV. *passim*, App. III.
Donne, 247, 355
Douglas, Gavin (1474-1522), 266, 373, 398
Drayton, 361
Drummond, 266
Dryden, 131, 132, 175, 400
Dunbar, William (1465?-1530?), 110, 181, 219-21, 266, 273-5, 407 *note*
Dyer, 160

E.I.O., 56, 154 *note*, 257, 258 *note*, 398
Elinor Rumming, 242 *sq.*
Elision, 172 *sq.*
Ellis, George (1753-1815), 185
Elton, Professor, x
Epanaphora, xvii, 149, 329 *note*, 399
Epanorthosis, xvii
Epithalamion, Spenser's, 359, 362
Equivalence, 43 and *passim*, *also* App. I.
Erceldoune, Thomas of, 94 *note*
Eve of St. Agnes, The, 366
Eve of St. Mark, The, 139
Everyman, 340
Exeter Book, the, 6

Faerie Queene, The, 350 *sq.*, esp. 363 *sq.*
Fairfax, 352, 359
Farmer, Mr., 335 *note*, 337 *note*
"February," Spenser's, 353 *sq.*, 382, 407 *sq.*
"Feet," xvii, 41 *sq.*, note on Bks. I. II. III. 299, App. V.
Ferrers, George (1500?-1579), 334, 365
Ferrex and Porrex, 344 *sq.*

"Firdausi's line," 222 *note*
Fletchers, the, 365
Flower and the Leaf, The, 178, 270, 374
Four Elements, The, 339
Four Hymns, Spenser's, 359
Fourteener, the, 39 and *passim*
French, prosody of, 23 and *passim*
Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, 347 *note*
Fuller Maitland, Mr., x
Furnivall, Dr., x, 222 *note*, 230 *note*, 232 *sq.*, and *notes passim*

Gamelyn, The Tale of, 124 *note*, 194 *sq.*, 241, 254-6, 327
Gammer Gurton's Needle, 337
Garmond of Good Ladies, The, 272
Gascoigne, George (1525?-1577), vi, 149, 311, 322, 328, 329, 411
Gawain and the Green Knight, 105, 373
Generydes, 264
Genesis and Exodus, 58, 60-4, 72 *sq.*, 129, 142, 151, 353
Gilbert, Mr., 331
Glasgerion, 398
Glover, 393
Godric, St. (*d.* 1170), Fragments of, *Frontispiece*, 30 *sq.*, 42 *note*, 371
Golagros and Gawane, 111 *note*
Golden Targe, The, 273 *note*
Golding, Arthur (1536?-1605?), 332
Golias and the Goliardic poems, 18, 22
"Good King Wenceslas," 54 *note*, 391 *note*
Googe, Barnabe (1540-1594), 323, 324
Gorboduc, 343 *sq.*
Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions, A, 330 *sq.*
Gospel of Nicodemus, The, 264 *note*
Gower, John (1325?-1408), 89, 139-42, 160 *note*, 373
Grave Poem, The, 28 *note*
Gray, 219-21
Greek, prosody of, 22, 23
Greene, Robert (1560?-1592), 346 *sq.*
Grimald, Nicholas (1519-1562), 330
Guest, Edwin (1800-1880), v, 3, 7-9, 31, 36, 41 *sq.*, 79, 81 *sq.*, 142, 162, 182, 307, 325, 356, 393, 403, 405, 408
Guildford, Nicholas of, 57
Guy of Warwick, 94 *note*

Hales, Thomas of, 56 *note*
Halliwell, J. O. (1820-1889), 219 and *notes passim*
Hampole, Richard Rolle of (1290?-1349), 89, 101, 129, 135, 136, 257 *note*
Handful of Pleasant Delights, A, 330 *sq.*
Handling Sin, 112
Hannay, Patrick, 282 *note*
Hardie, Professor, 388
Harrowing of Hell, The, 203 *sq.*
Havelok, 65, 69, 73, 77
Hawes, Stephen (?-1523?), 219-21, 234-9, Interchap. III. *passim*, 368
Hazlitt, Mr., *notes passim*, especially in Bks. III. and IV.
"Head-rhyme," 192 *note*
Heine, 247 *note*
Hendyng, Proverbs of. See *Proverbs*
Henryson, Robert (1430?-1506?), 266 *sq.*
Here, the Prophecy of, 28 *note*
Hernani, 151 *note*
Harvey, Gabriel (1545?-1630?), 319
Heywood, John (1497?-1580), 334 *note*, 338 *sq.*
Hick Scorner, 340, 341
Holland, Sir Richard, 111 *note*
Hopkins, Father Gerard, 382
Horn, King, 65, 70, 77
Horstmann, Dr., 64 *note*, 249 *note*, 264 *note*
House of Fame, The, 159-61
Huchowne (?), 187, 265
Hugo, Victor, 418 *note*
Hume, Alexander (1560?-1609), 286

Ingoldsby Legends, The, 132 *sq.*, 278
In Memoriam metre, 153
"Interlace," 113
Interlude of Youth, 341
Itylus, 136 *note*

Jack Juggler, 341
James I. (of Scotland) (1394-1437), 266 *sq.*
Johnson, Dr., 394
Jonson, 355, 366
"Judas" ballad-poem, the, 251 *note*

Keats, 139, 418
Ker, Professor, x, 13 *note*, 19 *note*, 176, 374 *note*
Keyne, The Well of St., 40
King Alexander, 91, 124
King Hart, 276
King Johan, 336, 337
King's Quair, The, 269 *sq.*
Kingsley, Charles, 319, 402
Knight's Tale, The, 226, 227
Kyd, Thomas (1557?-1595?), 346 *sq.*

Laing, David (1793-1878), Bk. III. Chap. IV. *notes*

Lamb, Charles, 232 *note*, 348
Lament for the Makers, 273 *note*
Langland, William (1330?-1400?), 13, 89, 101 *sq.*, 110, 179-87, 190 *sq.*, 256, 273-5, 373
Latin prosody, 14-22
Lawrence, Dr. J., 30 *note*
Laws of English verse, general, 82-84
Layamon (*fl. c.* 1210), 6, 24, 29, 36-38, 45 *sq.*, 51, 52, 57, 72 *sq.*, 101 *sq.*, 120, 181, 183, 406
Lee, Mr. Sidney, 361
Legend of Good Women, The, 164
Lemoyne, the Père, 418 *note*
Levy, Miss Amy, 374
"Lewes Song," the, 125, 409
Lodge, Thomas (1558?-1625), 346 *sq.*
London Lickpenny, 225 *sq.*
Lonelich, Henry (15th cent.), 231
Longfellow, 323
Lotos Eaters, The, 366
Love-Rune, A, 56
Lowell, Mr., 228 *note*, 410
Lusty Juventus, 341
Lydgate, John (1370?-1451?), 171 *note*, 175 *note*, 218-31, and *passim* in Bk. III. Chap. II. and Interchap. III.
Lyndsay, Sir David (1490-1565), 277-8
Lyrics, the Harleian, 114 *sq.*; 147

Macaulay, Professor, 139 *sq.*, 196
Machault, G. de, 161
Macro Plays, the, 216
Magdalene, the Digby, 217, 337
Magnificence, 337
Manasses, 22
Manning, Robert. *See* Robert of Brunne
Mano, 312 *note*
Mapes, Walter, 22
Marlowe, Christopher (1569-1593), 346 *sq.*
Marriage of Wit and Science, 341
Martial, 16 *note*, 388
Masson, Professor, 48
Mayor, Mr. J. B., vii
M'Cormick, Professor, 156
Metham, John (*c.* 1450), 264 *note*
Meum est propositum, etc., 20, 124
Mill on Hamilton, 82 *note*
Milton, 20 *note*, 142, 160, 170, 177, 307, 361
Minot, Lawrence (1300?-1352), 129, 138
Mirror for Magistrates, The, 334, 365
Misfortunes of Arthur, The, 343 *sq.*
Mitford, William (1744-1827), v, 185
Montgomerie, Alexander (1556?-1610?), 119 *note*, 282-5
Moore, 403 *note*
Moral Ode, The, 34 *sq.*, 42 *note*, 47, 51, 52, 67, 406
More, Sir Thomas (1478-1535), 364
Morris, Dr., 29, and Bks. I. and II. *passim*
Morris, Mr. William, 139
Morte d'Arthure, the Thornton, 186, 187
Mother Hubberd's Tale, 358
Mourning Maiden, The, 279
Muiopotmos, 358
Mure of Rowallan, Sir William (1594-1657), 286-7
Musset, A. de, 418 *note*

Nash, Thomas (1567-1601), 346 *sq.*
Nicholas of Guildford, 57. See also *Owl and Nightingale*
Nicodemus, Gospel of, 264 *note*
Niecks, Professor, x
Northumbrian Psalter, The, 64-67
Nut-brown Maid, The, 56, 154 *note*, 243, 257 *sq.*, 295, 297

Occleve, Thomas (1370?-1456?), 231-4, Interchap. III. *passim*
Omond, Mr. T. S., vii
Orison of Our Lady, The, 35 *sq.*, 42 *note*, 47
Orm (*c.* 1200), the *Ormulum*, 29, 38-40, 56, 72 *sq.*, 121, 386, 406
Orpheus and Eurydice (Henryson), 272
Ovid, 21
Owl and the Nightingale, The, 56 *sq.*, 72 *sq.*, 122, 129, 142, 151

Palice of Honour, The, 276
Palladius on Husbandry, 264
Paradise of Dainty Devices, The, 330 *sq.*
Parliament of Foules, The, 152, 153
Pastime of Pleasure, The, 237 *sq.*, 368
Paternoster, The, 29, 33, 47
Patience, 102 *sq.*
Pearl, The, 107 *sq.*, 194
Peebles to the Play, 280 *note*
Peele, George (1558?-1597?), 346 *sq.*
Percy, Thomas (1729-1811), 185
Petrarch, 145, 307, 361
"Petrarchian" and "Petrarchan," 307 *note*
Phaer, Thomas (1510-1560), 332
Piers Plowman, 110, 179 *sq.*
Piers Plowman's Creed, 186
Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, The, 225 *sq.*
Pistyl of Susan, The, 107
Plowman's Tale, The, 178
Poema Morale. See *Moral Ode*
Poetry, History of English. *See* Warton, Courthope

Political Songs (Camden Society), 125 *sq.*
Political Songs (Rolls Series), 261
Pollard, Mr. A. W., 203 *note*, 339 *note*
Pollok, 393
Pope, 174
"Poulter's measure," 310 and *passim* to end
Prick of Conscience, The, 135 *sq.*
Princely Pleasures of Kenilworth, 365
Prior, 365
Prioress's Tale, 157
Prosody, definition of, 5
Prothalamion, Spenser's, 359, 362
Provençal, prosody of, 23
Proverbs of Alfred, 58-60, 72 *sq.*, 108
Proverbs of Hendyng, 58, 60, 72 *sq.*, 93, 108

Quantity, 5, App. II.
Quia Amore Langueo, 257 *note*, 398
Quintilian, 198 *note*

Ralph Roister Doister, 337
Ramsay, Allan, 266
Rauf Coilyear, 111 *note*
Reason and Sensuality, 230
Redgauntlet, 398
Religious Songs (Percy Society), 122 *sq.*
Reliquiae Antiquae (Halliwell and Wright), Bks. I. II. III. *notes passim*
Revenge, The, 67
"Rhetorical Prosody," 149
Rhyme, 19, and *passim* to App.
Rhyme-royal, 150, and *passim* later
Rhyming Poem, The, 24, 44 *sq.*, 414
Rhythms, History of English. See Guest
Richard Cœur de Lion, 91, 92 *note*
Richard the Redeless, 179
"Rip van Winkle," 391 *note*
Ritson, Joseph (1752-1803), 138 *note*, 220 *sq.*, 263 *note*
Robene and Makyne, 271
Robert of Brunne (*fl.* 1290-1340), 112-4
Robert of Gloucester (*fl.* 1260-1300), 67-9, 247, 255, 386
Robin Hood ballads, the, 254
Rolland, John (*fl. c.* 1560), 280
"Romance Six," the, 92 *sq.*
Romaunt of the Rose, The, 145-7
Rorate Coeli desuper, 273, 274 *notes*
Rossetti, 247
Ruines of Time, The, 358

Sackville, Thomas, Earl of Dorset (1536-1608), 322, 332-4, 344 *sq.*, 357
Saints' Lives, 67, 249 *sq.*
Saints' Lives (Barbour's?), 268
Satire of the Three Estates, 278
Scandinavian, prosody of, 24
Schick, Dr., 222 *sq.*
Schipper, Dr., 111, 139, 223, 405
Scott, Alexander (1525?-1584?), 280-82, 419 *note*
Scott, Sir Walter, 91, 278
Secrets of the Philosoffres, The, 229
Sempill, Robert (1530-1595), 278
Seven Sages, The, and its group, 91
Shakespeare, William (1564-1616), 59, 307, 348, 361, 364
Shelley, 364, 365
Shenstone, 117, 174, 197, 365
Shepherd's Kalendar, The, 337, 352 *sq.*
Ship of Fools, The, 240
Sidney, Sir Philip, x, 253, 361
Sievers, Dr., 13 *note*
Sing hey, trix! 278
Sinners Beware, 55
Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes, 348 *note*
Sir Degravant, 97, 98
Sir Launful, 263
Sir Percevale, 97
Sir Thopas, 144 *sq.*, 354, 374
Sir Tristrem, 65 *note*, 94 *sq.*
Skeat, Professor, 7-10, 60 *sq.*, Bk. II. Chaps. IV. and V. *passim*, 179 *note*, 190 *note*, 222 *note*, 226 *note*, 241, 252 *notes*
Skelton, John (1460?-1529), and "Skeltonics," 234-5, 240-5, Interchap. III. *passim*, 335, 392 *sq.*
Slur, 172 *sq.*
Smith, Prof. Gregory, vi, 271 *note*
Smith, Miss Toulmin, 204 *note*
Song against the King of Almaine, 125
Song of the Husbandman, 126
Songs and Carols (Percy Society), 262 *sq.*
Sonnet, the, 307 *sq.*
Southey, v, 40 *note*
Southwell, 323
Speak Parrot, 244
Specimens of Early English (Dr. Morris and Prof. Skeat), Bks. I. and II. *passim*
Specimens of English Literature, 15th and 16th Centuries (Prof. Skeat), Bk. III. *passim*
Specimens of Lyric Poetry, 114 *sq.*
Spenser, Edmund (1552?-1599), 177, 319, 350-69, 376-7, 382, 398, 461
Stanyhurst, Richard (1547-1618), 319
Steele, Mr., 229
Stewart, Mr., 8
Story of Thebes, The, 226 *sq.*

"Strangere," 113
"Substitution," 43 and *passim*, also App. I.
Surrey, Henry Howard, Earl of (1517?-1547), 172, 308-16
Swift, 393
Swifte, Mr., 8, 9
Swinburne, Mr., 49, 136, 194, 210, 366
Synizesis, 172 *note*

Tale of Melibee, 315
Tamburlaine, 347 *note*
Tancred and Gismund, 349 *note*
Tate and Brady, 247
Tayis Bank, 279
Tears of the Muses, The, 358
Temple of Glass, The, 227 *sq.*
Ten Brink, 295 *note*
Tennyson, Lord, 49, 171 *note*, 345, 366
Terza rima, 153, 311 *note*
Testament of Cressid, 271
"Tetremimeral," 270 *note*
Thackeray, 392
Thaun, Philippe de (*fl. c.* 1120), 38 *note*, 53 and *note*
Theatre of Voluptuous Worldlings, The, 351, 359
Theodorus Prodromus, 22
Thersites, 341
Thetbaldus, 53
Thistle and the Rose, The, 273 *note*
Thomson, 365
Thopas, Sir, 93, 144 *sq.*, 177
Thornton Romances, 97
Tithonus, 345
Torrent of Portugal, 407 *note*
Tottel's Miscellany, Bk. IV. Chap. I. *passim*, 330
"Town(e)ley" Plays, 203 *sq.*
Trevisa, John of (1346-1412), 145, 167
Triggs, Dr., 228
Tristrem, Sir, 65 *note*, 94 *sq.*
Triumphs of Love and Fortune, 342
Troilus and Creseide, 155-8
Turberville, George (1540-1610), 324, 325
Tusser, Thomas (1524?-1580), 185, 326-8, 408
Twa Maryit Wemen and the Wedo, The, 110, 181, 273, 373
Two Nightingale Poems, 229
Tyrwhitt, Thomas (1730-1780), 165
Tzetzes, 22

"University Wits," the, 345 *sq.*

Van der Noodt, John, 351 *note*
Varro, 241
Verlaine, 418 *note*
Vernon MS., 107 *note*, 129-38, 144
Virgil's Gnat, 358
Virgin, The Joys of the, 55
Vision of Sin, The, 171 *note*
Visions of Bellay, 351, 359
Vox and the Wolf, The, 71, 129

Wallace, 269
Warner, William (1558?-1609), 332
Warton, Thomas (1728-1790), 4, 221 *note*
Watson, Bp. Thomas (1513-1584), 319
Webbe, 355
Webster, Mr. A. B., x
"Wheel" (a short or short-lined stanza suffixed as coda to a longer one), 105 and *passim* in Bks. II. and III.
Whitaker, John (1735-1808), 179 *note*
William of Palerne, 102 *sq.*, 181 *note*
William of Shoreham (*fl. c.* 1330), 124
Wither, 139
"Wits," the University, 345 *sq.*
Wordsworth, 361 *note*
Wright, Thomas (1810-1877), 190, 191, and Bks. I. II. III. *notes passim*
Wyatt, Sir Thomas (1503?-1542), 172, 305-12, 357, 375
Wyntoun, Andrew (1350?-1420), 160 *note*, 267 *sq.*

"York" Plays, 205 *sq.*

END OF VOL. I

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